

A 21ST CENTURY ETHICAL TOOLBOX

Fourth
Edition

Anthony Weston



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A 21ST CENTURY ETHICAL TOOLBOX

ANTHONY WESTON



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PREFACE

A 21st Century Ethical Toolbox is a textbook for a college ethics or applied ethics course, with applications in any course that ventures into practical ethical issues. Its most basic aim is to enable its users to make a more constructive difference, in both word and deed, in problematic ethical situations. To do so requires, as you will see, a wide range of skills. We all need those skills, and we need them all—daily, it seems, we need them more—in the life of community and state, in school and in our families and on the job, as well as across the range of practical ethical work, from the law, the ministry, and community service to medicine, the service professions, teaching at all levels, and just plain good citizenship.

In service of that aim, you will find here a wide range of topics, from a careful survey of moral values to tools for critical, creative, and constructive thinking, moral vision, and making a real difference. You will also encounter a wide range of writers, from ancient Greek and Chinese philosophers to contemporary college students, novelists, architects, cranks, prophets, Nobel Peace Prize winners alongside unsung community activists, some provocative contemporary philosophers, and others with stories to tell too. Good company. I hope you find this book a rewarding, inspiring, and consistently useful resource—a good toolbox indeed.

Dozens of introductory ethics textbooks are available. Mostly they distinguish themselves in subtle ways: a slightly different selection of theories here, a little more history or a more multicultural perspective there. Each approach is important and useful. For better or worse, though, this text differs from the others in bigger and bolder ways.

First, every theme introduced here is directly in service of an improved ethical intelligence and through it of an engaged and enabled moral practice. Other skills often lovingly inculcated in ethics courses, such as theory building and argument reconstruction, do come up, but only in the way that music theory might come up in a voice course. We're really here, as it were, to sing.

Second, a far wider range of skills is offered in this book than in traditional ethics texts. Problem-solving creativity may be as crucial to ethical intelligence as responsiveness to values and the analytical and critical skills usually featured in ethics courses. Minding the evidence, taking care with the

shape of our very speech itself, moral vision and imagination, learning how to “break out of the box” that reduces so many ethical problems to dilemmas between two sharply opposed and supposedly exhaustive options—all of these skills, rarely even glimpsed from a distance in other ethics texts, have a central place here.

Contentious issues are likewise approached with a reconstructive intent. The familiar controversies are here—abortion, animals, sex, environment, social justice—as well as some that will be less familiar. But the familiar points of disagreement are not the main focus—certainly not the only focus—of attention. Moral theories are not deployed as argumentative or combative frameworks, and issuing definitive moral judgments is not the aim. About the various contending arguments, each surely with something to offer, we instead shift the questions we ask. Rather than trying to figure out which side is right, we ask what *each* side is right *about*. Then we may be able to find some common ground, or at least some creative ways to shift the problem toward matters that we can do something about—together. Figuring out how to make a constructive difference is as important as figuring out who is right.

Finally, the working hypothesis of this book is that it is actually possible to make progress on the ethical issues of the day. We *can* make a constructive difference. Thinking clearly about those issues is a good start, for sure, but we can ask much more than that. We can also make progress on deeper levels: seeing farther into the issue; understanding each other better; and devising new, mutually agreeable ways forward, while strengthening and enlivening the ethical community that enables us to take up any issue constructively together in the first place. Welcome to the good work.

TEACHING WITH THIS BOOK

Ethics so conceived readily lends itself to interactive teaching. In fact it *requires* interactive teaching. It requires constant in-class practice. There is no other way to learn it. This book therefore differs from most other ethics texts in pedagogical terms too. It insistently invites, and consistently supports, an active and engaged pedagogy.

Toolbox had its start, now nearly two decades ago, in ever-growing sets of readings designed to free up my own classes’ time for practice. My aim was to collect most of the necessary introductions and discussions and put them in material that could be assigned prior to class and for the most part could be understood by students on their own. Today this has come to be called “flipping” the classroom—I am for it. Throughout, my aim is to do the usual work of lecture in the book instead, leaving actual class meetings for the class to work.

This book’s focus on teaching constructive practical skills like dialogue and creative problem solving also undergirds an active pedagogy. The text

invites a wide range of experiential and “applied” activities for an ethics class. Some of these are in-class activities: structured dialogues and workshops, simulations, surveys, idea-generating challenges. Exercises at the end of each chapter, along with some of the more ambitious challenges in the **Going Farther** sections between the chapters, introduce some of these activities. The “Teaching Like a Pragmatist” Endnote section offers a little more detail as well as giving them a more philosophical context.

Many of these activities in turn aim beyond the classroom. As the “Teaching Like a Pragmatist” Endnote section also explains, students in my classes have sponsored workshops on conflict mediation and creativity, co-framed beds with the guests at local shelters for the homeless, mediated closer long-term collaboration between a local retirement community and our college, conducted a “Council of All Beings” for the community to extend our discussion of environmental ethics, and launched an “ethical cookbook” initiative to address local food insecurity issues while also promoting healthy eating and local organic growing – among other projects. In recent years I have structured my course directly around student-designed ethical change work, using this book as a conceptual and practical support structure and scaffolding for the process. All of this flows naturally from the *Toolbox*, and I encourage you—teachers and students alike—to embrace and pursue this larger kind of work.

CHANGES IN THE FOURTH EDITION

In this fourth edition I have tried both to respect many users’ major investments in syllabi based on the third edition, and to make a major upgrade to the text for the times.

The biggest change is that I have dropped Part IV of the third edition—chapters 16 through 18—repositioning much of that material earlier in the text, as suggested by a number of reviewers, and leaving aside some of the rest. Many users were uncertain about Part IV’s themes or those chapters’ intent and placement. My hope is that those themes and readings carried over from the old Part IV will be clearer and more topical in their new locations. The third edition’s chapter 17, for example, which some felt was too activist to be a proper chapter, is now a separate Resource section at the end, somewhat more expansive, and certainly freer to be itself. Other overarching themes from the old closing chapters now show up early in the text.

This shift also means that the chapter on Moral Vision is now the book’s final chapter. Vision is indeed the most venturesome theme, and in many ways the most affirmative—an aspirational note on which to end. Please don’t slight it. In fact, *celebrate* it! Since some instructors found the theme unfamiliar—but, really, how can ethics do without vision?—and therefore especially challenging, I have tried to expand the exposition accordingly.

The third edition added a number of regular optional sections, called “Using Your Tools” (UYTs), between every other chapter, offering various ways to expand and develop the themes of the chapters without imposing upon them. This fourth edition takes this another step, increasing the number and variety of these sections, and interpolating them more often. They are now called **Going Farther** sections. Many of the old UYTs are here, but there are a number of new pieces as well.

This edition’s chapter 13 combines the third edition’s chapters 13 (Creative Problem Solving) and 14 (Reframing Problems) to make a more compact single chapter—with some “Going Farther” supplementary material as well. For those who want to fully explore these themes, rest assured that most of the third edition’s material remains, just in a more adaptable format. Those who want still more might consider my free-standing little handbook, *Creative Problem-Solving in Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

The combined effect of dropping the old Part IV and combining the old chapters 13 and 14 is that the book now has just fourteen chapters total, which should help instructors better fit it into the standard fourteen-week semester calendar. No main theme need be dropped, although there is probably still more material here than a single term can hold. That’s mostly on purpose; it gives instructors the chance to pick and choose, and may tempt students too to read farther.

Some chapters are sharpened up. Chapter 5, for one, is now somewhat more focused. The material on Rawls and justice is moved to its own **Going Farther** section. I have added critical sections, called “Complications,” for all four of the families of moral values in chapters 5 through 8—previously only Utilitarianism came in for direct criticism—and have tried to be more explicit about the scope and limits of each family as well. Given the inertia of moral theorizing, it can’t be emphasized enough (in my view) that the families of moral values need *not* be seen as competitors for the One True Ethics, but are (hopefully) helpful maps of certain regions of value, though partial maps too—each only maps some regions, and only from one perspective even on that region.

The focus of chapter 9 has also been sharpened. Previously I called it “Critical Thinking,” but it seems that some users were led by this title to expect a guide to logically analyzing and critiquing the standard sorts of philosophical arguments in applied ethics. That is a perfectly fine goal if one of your primary aims is to teach students how to read philosophical arguments in the contemporary analytical style. There are other fine books for this, however, such as David Morrow’s recent *Moral Argument* (Oxford University Press, 2017). It is *not* the intention of chapter 9 in this book. I am less interested in the infrastructure of argument-construction, counterexample, and the like than in careful generalization and the responsible sourcing of factual claims—learning to think critically, yes, but about the kinds of anecdotal appeals and under-analyzed correlations and the like that afflict many ethical

arguments today. That is, my central practical concern is specifically with the use of empirical evidence in ethical thinking. Chapter 9, accordingly, is now called “Minding the Evidence.”

Other and smaller changes include:

- The chapters are somewhat fuller in general
- A few chapters are relabeled, such as 1 and 2 (okay, the third edition’s “Ethics-Avoidance Disorders” was perhaps a bit much!)
- The review questions at the end of each chapters are expanded from ten to twelve
- There are parallel exercises in chapters 5 through 8. The same six broad moral issues are posed as the main subjects “For Reflection and Discussion” in each chapter, though with somewhat varied introductory explanations.
- Chapter 10 includes a new treatment of the Golden Rule.
- Chapter 12 now speaks of “bringing values into congruence” rather than “integrating values.” The idea is the same, but I have found that the new language makes it much clearer.

Speaking of major issues discussed, I should also note that some of the main themes have shifted, in accord with the times. A theme more prominent in this edition, for example, both in the text (including at the very beginning) and in the **Going Farther** sections, is justice to future generations, and correlatively the appropriate respect and care for Earth. I believe we are at a time of heightened urgency around these issues, and that some of the more usual but seemingly more manageable concerns of “applied ethics” need to make way for these larger, less manageable but immensely important issues to be brought to the fore.

This revision also comes at a time of exceptional tension in the body politic, and how it will play out is anyone’s guess at the moment. But the book does reflect its times. It is a little edgier, and more willing to confront some developments in ways that may seem partisan to some readers. Climate change denial, for one, has become ethically unconscionable, in my view, to put it bluntly—no longer a subject to be avoided because some readers might consider the topic controversial or the claims questionable. The line between textbook expository neutrality and advocacy is never hard and fast, and at times like these one could even argue that not taking a stance is also, actually, taking a stance. Not all widely advertised positions on such subjects are intellectually or morally equal, and in my view ethics now not only allows but requires that we call the pretenders out. You’ll see what I mean in due time.

As the Endnotes also explain, this book is written so that Part III can be used before Part II if users so wish. That is, you can explore skills for ethical practice (Part III) before the family/theory material in Part II. Sometimes I use the book in this way myself. A number of reviewers also reported using,

or wishing to use, just some of the skills-oriented material from Part III, particularly the chapters on Minding the Evidence (9) and Dialogue (11), before exploring Moral Values in more detail in the chapters of Part II. This is an entirely reasonable order too, in my view. There is a certain amount of cross-referencing between chapters and parts—both ways, in fact—but not much, and in any case I have been careful not to presuppose material from either part in the other. The order is up to you.

Finally, there are a few additions requested or suggested by users and reviewers that include were easy to make without any intrusion on established uses of the text—only to augment them, I hope. One is a concordance of themes. Users of the third edition noted that a wide variety of specific ethical issues come up through the text—environmental issues, abortion, assisted suicide, animals, and the rest of the the usual and sometimes not-so-usual list—but not, again, in chapters of their own. It can be difficult for students or instructors pursuing those issues to locate and connect all of the text’s various considerations and treatments of them. A new guide to “Major Ethical Issues Discussed,” at the end, now offers a quick and easy way to do so. Second, some other teachers suggested a glossary of key terms—more than just an index—coupled with a note of their key occurrences in the text, and especially their initial definitions. I appreciate this suggestion and have taken it as well.

RETURN OF THANKS

Many years of teaching in a wide variety of settings leaves me with many debts both large and small. First among these is my debt to my students, who have always taught me much and who lately, especially, have answered the challenge to take ethics into action—again and again—with a range of projects I could never have anticipated but that always open up novel and inspiring prospects. Their feedback on the text along the way has also improved it immeasurably.

Among colleagues, I am continuously grateful to my collaborators in the Elon University Department of Philosophy, past and present—Nim Batchelor, Ann Cahill, Martin Fowler, Amy Glaser, Ryan Johnson, Yoram Lubling, Stephen Bloch-Schulman, and John Sullivan—where for some years we have moved, each in our own interlacing ways, toward a practical ethics in something like the sense laid out here. Other colleagues, far and near and recent and past, have inspired various commissions and omissions: Beth Raps, Amy Halberstadt, Rebecca Todd Peters, Peter Williams, Elsebet Jegstrup, Tom Birch, Betty Morgan, J. Christian Wilson, Bob Jickling, Eva Feder Kittay, Joe Cole, Mike Simon, Richard McBride, and Patrick Hill, as well as a host of others, including my children, Anna Ruth and Molly, even in ways unbeknown to them. Many thanks and a deep bow to you all.

Among my colleagues, Professors Batchelor, Fowler, and Sullivan again contribute writing to this edition. Vance Ricks of Guilford College contributes a discussion to chapter 9 based on a running dialogue we have had for years about the places where critical thinking intersects with and informs ethics. Amy Glaser contributes a new piece, part of her dissertation and social-change work on children's liberation. As a reviewer in preparation for the second edition, Spoma Jovanovic of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro showed me how much further the book could go in the direction of communicative ethics; in this fourth edition, as in the third, she contributes a major reading on that theme to the "Dialogue" chapter. My student, Maggie Castor, Elon class of 2012, who encountered this book first as a textbook for her own introductory class in ethics taught by Professor Fowler, became my research assistant for the third edition in the Summer of 2011, and again for this fourth edition over the past year, and also again contributes some writing of her own, this time to the "Making a Difference" section. A number of students from the 2016 Senior Seminar in Philosophy at Elon collaborated to produce some of the dialogues in the exercises for chapters 2 and 11, and are specifically credited there.

I am also enormously grateful to many other users of the previous editions of this book, along with my little book *A Practical Companion to Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 4th ed., 2011), whose enthusiasm and encouragement have emboldened me to undertake yet another edition of "the big book." People across the United States and Canada are using this book to approach ethics in a new key, and increasingly in institution-wide general studies programs concerned with moral citizenship and "ethics across the curriculum" as well. I have heard from many and even met some of you. I am honored, and I hope this new edition, tailored with some of your needs in mind, will be even more helpful. Please continue to be in touch.

At Oxford University Press, Robert B. Miller patiently nurtured the first incarnation of this project through its slow coalescence and allowed it to come to completion in its own good time. Three times since he has repeated the feat, generally under conditions of more resistance and alarm from my end. As ever, I could not ask for a more consistently responsive, supportive, and politic editor.

Publisher's reviewers for the first edition were David Boersema, Richard L. Lipke, Verna Gehring, Patricia Murphy, and Jack Green Musselman. Reviewers for the second edition, along with Professor Jovanovic, included Ralph Acampora, Greta Bauer, Deborah Hawkins, and Stevens Wandmacher. My colleagues Professors Sullivan and Cahill also read significant parts of the manuscript for the second edition and offered helpful feedback and encouragement. Beth Raps was my utterly reliable and savvy assistant in every aspect of the preparation of that edition.

Reviewers for the third edition were Russell DiSilvestro, California State University–Sacramento; Douglas Drabkin, Fort Hays State University; Steven

M. Duncan, Bellevue College; Jeremy Garrett, California State University–Sacramento; Paul F. Jeffries, Ripon College; Keith Korcz, University of Louisiana at Lafayette; Karla Pierce, Florida State College–Jacksonville; Davis Sweet, Middlesex Community College and Massachusetts Bay Community College; and Kathryn Valdivia, University of San Diego.

For the fourth edition, reviewers were Tayo Basquiat, Bismark State College; Kristin Borgwald, Miami Dade College; Shari Collins, Arizona State University; Marcus Cooper, Wayne State University; Colin Patrick, Portland State University; Anna Peterson, University of Florida; Frank Ryan, Kent State University; Brook Sadler, University of South Florida; Albert R. Spencer, Portland State University; James H. VanderMay, Mid Michigan Community College; and Jeanne L. Wiley, College of Saint Rose.

For this edition, my colleague Professor Cahill again kindly advised me on several sections, and I was very pleased also to work with Elon’s Ketevan Kupatadze, Professor of World Languages and Cultures, who ably translated the new reading from Esperanza Guisán in chapter 6.

I would like to add that for all four editions, but most notably for the two most recent ones, many of the reviewers went well above and beyond the usual level of reviewing to offer exceptionally detailed and useful critiques and suggestions. (Total for this fourth edition was over fifty single-spaced pages.) Naturally I have not been able to take account of all of them (any author will recognize the amusing bind that arises when different reviewers sometimes recommend diametrically opposite changes; and there are others that would simply change the book into something quite different, though perhaps just as good or better an idea), but I was honored by all of them. Indeed I am deeply appreciative and moved by the care and even love that so many reviewers and users have shown for this project. I hope that all of you who worked so carefully through earlier editions will recognize the fruits of your labors in the book you now hold in your hands.

Needless to say, the commissions and omissions that remain—some of them even, scandalously, repeated—are to be charged to me alone. As always, feedback of all sorts is very welcome. May the circle continue to widen.

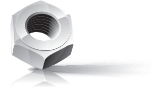
Anthony Weston
Durham, North Carolina
May 2017

I



EMBRACING ETHICS

CHAPTER 1



What Is Ethics?

Our subject is ethics. It would be sensible to start by asking what ethics *is*, at its core.

Let us say that to think or act ethically is to *take care for the basic needs and legitimate expectations of others as well as our own*. This definition builds on certain key ideas. We can consider each of them in turn.

TAKING CARE

Ethics asks us, first and foremost, to “take care.” There are three different and relevant ways in which we can do so.

PAYING ATTENTION

First, we take care for something when we simply *look into or investigate it*. Put another way, on a first level, ethics asks us simply to *pay attention*.

On the personal level, ethics challenges us out of the tempting habits of relating to the world, especially other people, in self-absorbed and offhand ways. Probably you already know what it is like sometimes to step out of the world of roles—teachers or students, customers, waitresses, political candidates, too-loud neighbors or too-fast drivers—to see the *people*, the feeling, hoping, and striving selves behind these roles, and be seen ourselves the same way in turn. Ethics asks us to do this more often, more consciously and deliberately—and at times when it is not so easy.

Pay attention to larger worlds as well. Half the human race is trying to survive on impossibly meager provisions, basic personal security is uncertain for many people, and, alas, there is persistent malfeasance on all levels, up to global corporations and governments too. On the other sides of these coins, there are widespread initiatives for social and racial justice and broad movements for corporate and social responsibility from within the corporate and governmental worlds themselves. Meanwhile, ethical attention may not stop at the human species boundary, or the present generation, either.

The Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy enjoins us to pay attention even to our great-great-great-grandchildren. When our actions today have that kind of reach—when for instance we may be leaving them degraded land and climate—then, once again, there is no turning away. Once again too, ethics can highlight real alternatives, different paths—we must pay attention to new possibilities, emerging moral visions, as well.

You can also pay attention to ethics itself—the field, that is: its history, its skills, its categories. It is a welcome implication of this sense of “taking care” that the study of ethics itself turns out to be, already, a way of being ethical. Just by picking up this book and beginning to read it, then, you are beginning to take care for ethics in the sense that you aim to learn more about it. It is not just that you will be ethical someday . . . hopefully . . . but rather that you are ethical *now*, as you devote yourself to better understandings of the core moral values for which ethics speaks and the skills it takes to put them into action. Welcome to the good work!

CONSCIENTIOUSNESS

In a second sense, we “take care” for something when we are *conscientious* about it; that is, when we’re “careful” of it. In part, then, ethical thinking and action, in the broadest sense, is an attempt simply to acknowledge the others around and next to us, which is certainly one basic legitimate expectation. Everyday decency, acknowledging others who have cared or “paid forward” for us, respecting others’ rights, following the rules (as in, for example, good sportsmanship) . . . these are forms of careful action in this sense, reflecting and sustaining an understanding of ourselves as one among others, taking care together.

You might be interested in another way to look at the “seven generations” idea. In traditional cultures where women began bearing children in their teens, it would have been common for a young person to know their parents’ parents’ parents—their great-grandparents, who might even still have been in their vigorous fifties or sixties. In the very same way, at the other end of life, they themselves would have been likely to know their own great-grandchildren: three generations in the other direction. Add all of this together, counting a person’s own generation in between, and your view could encompass seven generations.

We won’t know our great-great-great-grandchildren—seven generations straight into the future—at least until time machines are invented (hmm, and how would *that* change ethics?)—but we can actually know seven generations over the course of a long life if we think of ourselves, like this, in the *middle*. It is no surprise, then, that one of the most powerful imperatives in Native American culture is to “Remember who you are!” The reminder is that we are individuals, no doubt, but we are also children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren of particular known people, and likewise are or may be parents and grandparents and great-grandparents of particular but soon-to-come people who will inherit this Earth after our stewardship.

Put another way, we ourselves are products of the same kind of care-taking that ethics asks of us in turn. After all, we are here because our parents bore and raised us; because others bore and raised *them*; because whole multitudes of people raised food and created cities and struggled over systems of governance and inquired into the workings of the natural world and of the heart. And this is not just a point about the past. Here and now, parents—yours, for example, and possibly you yourself as well—give of themselves to sustain the safety and love of a family for children and partners. If you are a college student, a multitude of others, from parents and grateful former alumni to dedicated faculty and a variety of taxpayers, are covering much of the cost of your education. They are “paying it forward” in the hopes that you will pay it forward too, eventually, in turn. Out in the public world, think of the legions of strangers, every day, who take care to drive carefully, treat you and each other decently, and just do their jobs, whatever they are, honestly and well, sustaining and maybe even improving the world. As do we, ourselves (I hope!)

SUSTAINING AND FURTHERING THE GOOD

Ethics asks us to pay attention, then, and to be conscious and conscientious about standing within larger patterns of relationship and expectation. But there is a third sense of “taking care” in which we also take *action*.

In this third sense, we take care for something when we act to *sustain and further it*. We take care for something or someone by taking care *of* it or them. To act ethically in this case, again very broadly speaking, is to actually try to meet some of the basic needs and legitimate expectations of others as well as ourselves: to sustain or nurture others, as well as ourselves, materially or spiritually or both.

It might be as simple as trying to be a good steward of the earth or taking your surplus produce or clothes to the local homeless shelter; or building homes with Habitat for Humanity, which serves specific people and families, who are usually building right alongside you. Or it might be as extreme as the Russian botanists who allowed themselves to starve to death during the siege of Leningrad in World War II rather than eat the abundant food all around them, because that food happened to be the world’s last seed reserves for hundreds of berry species. Those species, saved at such cost, are now regenerated and spread around the world.

Jesus spoke of no man having greater love than to give his life for his friends. These are people who gave their lives for *seeds*. There are a few more human possibilities than we may think in our cynical moments! Peter Benchley, author of *Jaws*, was so chagrined by the anti-shark hysteria created by his book that he devoted the rest of his life and fortune to shark conservation and ocean protection. Not just for future human generations, either—also for the sharks. He felt as though he’d incurred an ethical debt to them as well. Yes—sharks.

It is a question within ethics just what people’s basic needs and expectations are or how far and in what ways you or I are obliged to try to meet them.

The key point, though, is that ethics at least requires that the needs and expectations of others have some role in what we do and how we decide about it—that is, that we “take care” for them in our actions.

NEEDS AND EXPECTATIONS

As a rough beginning, we can say that basic needs include things like food, clothing, and shelter—more broadly, sustenance. We might add health, education, community, and a chance to participate. Freedom. A voice. A liveable environment, too.

These are the conditions that all of us need to survive and to have some chance to flourish. I don’t mean, though, that people are obliged to simply give these things to anyone in need. That is one possible ethics, but not the only one. Ethics in general, again, just requires us to pay attention to them—not to live as an island, unaware or unconcerned, blind to anyone else. Ethics calls us to recognize that others have needs and expectations as well as ourselves, regardless of how exactly we go on to respond to them, if we do.

I also don’t mean that this list of basic needs is final or fixed. Debating exactly what our basic needs *are* is one more central and serious question within ethics. Our conception of morally relevant basic needs has shifted over time. Medicine, for example, wasn’t considered a basic need until quite modern times, which was the first time it became especially effective. (Or put it this way: health was always a basic need, but until modern times there were fewer effective ways in which others might be morally impelled to help when health failed.) Other needs may now be on their way toward recognition as “basic,” for better or worse: a clean environment, for one. Human diversity within ecological diversity, perhaps.

We all have legitimate expectations to be treated with respect and as equals. Some legitimate expectations are rights: to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”; to be able to speak our minds or worship (or not) as we please; and so on. But rights are only one aspect or expression of legitimate expectations; other legitimate expectations take other forms. We legitimately expect each other to act responsibly, to keep promises, and so on. There are a variety of views within ethics about how to think about legitimate expectations (starting with: What makes some expectations “legitimate” in the first place?), once again a debate to which we will come in due time.

A FEW OTHER THINGS

There is, finally, that term “others.” Ethical thinking and action take care for the basic needs and legitimate expectations of *others* as well as our own.

Who is this? Other people, yes: that is now a given (though historically, as some of our readings will note, this was not always the case: all too often ethics has been limited to one’s own class or gender or city . . .). These days,

“others” may also include (some?) other animals and the natural world too. Even sharks, maybe. Exactly what other “others” ethics may include is one more foundational question in ethics. Often, indeed, it is ethical questions at the “edges”—such as, today, questions about other animals—from which we learn the most about ethics at its core. These are the most challenging questions, as well, to ethical “business as usual.” It seems that a certain open-endedness is a key to ethics as well.

Again, note that our own selves are included too. Ethics takes care for the basic needs and legitimate expectations of others *and also our own*. Ethics according to this definition is not opposed to the self. Quite the contrary: our own needs and expectations are built into the definition. Our own needs get a voice as well as others’. The essential thing, though, is that our own needs cannot be the whole story. Ethics connects us to a larger world. The self doesn’t vanish—it just awakens to itself as, yes, one among others.

Here is one other note about terms. The term “moral” is typically used in much the same sense as “ethical,” but there can be a difference of shading. Sometimes a “moral” person is a little more like a person who just reliably does what’s right, while an “ethical” person is a little more like someone who thinks twice about it, or is more engaged with issues where values are in flux or at odds. Some philosophers use the word “moral” to describe the values we actually hold—the word “moral” traces back to the Latin “mores,” meaning manners or customs—whereas by “ethics” they mean the *study* of morals, or more broadly the deliberate process of thinking our morals through, of systematizing and criticizing and possibly even revising our moral values, as well as more consciously embracing them.

I will respect these shadings in this book, but without making much more of them. From now on, for example, typically I will speak of moral *values* but ethical *issues* or *debates* or *problems*. Again, though, nothing serious hangs on this usage. Some authors, even some reprinted in this book, use the terms interchangeably without making such a distinction. In the end there is still one subject, our vital subject: taking care for the basic needs and legitimate expectations of others as well as our own.

OUR DEFINITION

In its completely spelled-out form, this section’s definition of ethics is this: We think or act ethically when we *investigate, are conscientiously attentive to, and/or try to meet the basic needs and sustain legitimate expectations of others as well as our own*. Since you may have noticed that this is a bit on the awkward side for everyday reference, typically we can use the briefer version that was our first attempt:

We think or act ethically when we take care for the basic needs and legitimate expectations of others as well as our own.

ETHICS AS A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

The main point of studying ethics is to learn how to engage with ethical values and issues in more critical, systematic, and effective ways. The point of having an ethical *toolbox* is to develop the understandings and the skills you need to make a more constructive difference, in both word and deed, in problematic ethical situations.

Ethics is a learning experience! We want to get *better* at it. You will find that there are many ways. Here are five to anticipate as we begin this study together.

SYSTEMATIC THINKING

Philosophy in general might be defined as the study of how things hang together in the broadest sense—that, at least, is how the 20th-century pragmatist philosopher Wilfred Sellars put it. Sellars' definition certainly applies in ethics: part of the philosopher's work in ethics is to try to figure out which of our moral values are the most basic and whether there is a common and single core to all of ethics—in short, whether and how moral values “hang together.” Studying ethics is, in part, learning something of the history and general outline of this *systematic* thinking.

Consider: we hold a lot of moral values. Fairness, equality, respect, and responsibility; reducing pain and suffering; “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”; humility, benevolence, keeping your promises; honesty, responsibility, community, dignity . . . and that is only a barest beginning of a list. A natural question is: how can we discern the forest—a bigger and hopefully clearer picture, more order and less confusion—amidst all these trees?

Many of our moral values are related to fairness, equality, and justice. Perhaps we could find some elegant and clear way of drawing them together, some relatively simple criterion or bottom line? Or again, many moral values have to do with personal virtues, like honesty, humility, and self-possession. Maybe there is some relatively clear and focused human ideal that connects these different virtues—that gives them each a logical place in a single, unified picture. We would understand all the virtues better if we could paint that bigger picture with confidence and clarity.

You begin to see the hope: that we might discover that many of our moral values actually “hang together” in basic ways. There may be deep connections among moral values that can bring some order to the confusion that may strike us at first. In Part II of this book, we explore how moral values might be systematized into families, introducing one of the main projects of philosophical ethics today, sometimes also called ethical *theory*.

THE HISTORY OF ETHICS

Along the way we will explore some of the long and rich history of ethics as well. We will discover that much of it not only still speaks to us but in fact underlies and shapes ethical discussions to this day.

For example, the Ethics of the Person (as I call it in this book), formulated by the 18th/19th-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant, both gives voice to a widely felt kind of moral value and seeks to ground it in a deep way in the nature of reason itself. From Kant we learn to pay attention to persons—ourselves and others—as “ends and not merely means,” and even imagine ourselves living in an ideal “Kingdom of Ends.” More concretely, meanwhile, the 20th-century Jewish mystical philosopher Martin Buber famously gave voice to similar values with his contrast between “I/Thou” and “I/It” relationships. Persons are *subjects*, not mere objects—not mere “Its”!

Other historical thinkers offer quite different ethical ideas and ideals. The 19th-century British ethicist John Stuart Mill outlined the “Utilitarian” orientation that underlies much modern ethical and political thinking, with its famous formula of seeking the greatest good of the greatest number. Ancient Taoist understandings of an Ethics of Virtue give voice to an ethic of familial and community obligations. Ancient Greek views of virtue emphasize individual character-building. The Ethics of Relationship gives voice to the responsibilities that arise from our deep connections to others, from specific loved ones to our various adopted and cultural communities, in the midst of the generations, and all the way out to the larger living Earth. (“Remember who you are!”, indeed.)

This book will give you brief looks at classic and representative writings of all of these thinkers and traditions. I should add that, at least in the view of this book, we do not have to choose between them. Theirs is not a debate that someone must win and everyone else must lose. Instead, it is a conversation that all can deepen—you too, in the end. Ethical tradition gives you a variety of maps for moral landscapes. Like real maps, they can overlay and augment each other, mapping different aspects of the terrain for different purposes, but rarely is a map simply wrong. Some are just more useful than others for different purposes. It pays to have a good collection.

CRITICAL THINKING

Next, the study of ethics also requires us to look systematically and thoroughly into the empirical questions that underlie and define many ethical issues—“taking care,” remember, in the sense of *investigation*. Here we come to factual questions that are sometimes complex and difficult, but nonetheless have answers that can be determined with care and effort. How much do animals suffer in laboratories and slaughterhouses, for example? What are the effects of pornography, or violent video games, on subsequent behavior

and feelings? Is “restorative justice”—reconciliation rather than retribution—possible? And if so, what then?

On questions like these, we need to do more than simply assert what we think is obvious or seek out a few facts that seem to support what we already think. The real challenge is to find out more, to understand better, even if we have to change what we think as a result. Actual evidence is available, though it can be complex and uncertain at times. If we want to debate about such questions, we had better first get informed about them—and first from relatively unbiased sources, too. *Then* we can get into advocacy, if necessary, and begin to make up our minds. One notorious problem with ethical debates is that we often approach the factual issues already committed to some moral conclusion, and thus prejudiced as to the facts—or, all too often, not even interested in the actual facts. Your ethical learning here will invite you to take a more open and exploratory attitude.

Learning about other cultures’ practices may provoke some critical thinking as well. Are our views perhaps a little too constricted by limited experience or imagination? In Australia many couples live together in so-called “de facto” marriages—a legally recognized category. They do about as well as the official kind. Might that change our view of the morality of marriage? You can get marijuana legally in the Netherlands and the result is not disaster. What can we learn from that?

There are some societies that will not tolerate leaving even a single person homeless. Abortion, one of America’s most divisive and painful and seemingly fundamental social conflicts over the past thirty years, is barely an issue in many other countries (though now we’re exporting it), and historically was not much of an issue even here. Again, can we learn anything from these contrasts? Well, sure . . . and we can systematically seek to find out more.

Here’s another thing: when we explore some of the ways in which moral values hang together, we also may well find ourselves provoked to rethink some of our judgments that might not fit so well, or that come into conflict with each other. This too is a form of critical thinking. For example, many people who are “pro-life” when it comes to the abortion question do not seem quite as pro-life when it comes to questions like capital punishment or killing other animals for food. Is this a consistent position? Or does something have to give? Note that exactly the same kind of question also comes up the other way around. Some people who are “pro-choice” when it comes to the abortion question do not seem very pro-choice when it comes to, say, eating other animals. Again: What gives?

We’ll return to all of this too. It’s a part of the bigger work that lies ahead. The point for now is just that ethics challenges us to some hard thinking and perhaps change. Putting together a consistent and well-founded set of ethical judgments is hard work. Once again, there is more learning and thinking to do.

CREATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

Here's a tight spot

A child in second grade underwent chemotherapy for leukemia. When she returned to school, she wore a scarf to hide the fact that she had lost all her hair. But some of the children pulled it off, and in their nervousness laughed and made fun of her. The child was mortified and that afternoon begged her parents not to make her go back to school. Her parents tried to encourage her, saying, "The other children will get used to it, and anyway your hair will soon grow in again."

Suppose you are the teacher. This is your class. Rights and wrongs are pretty clear in this case, don't you think? You need to defend the afflicted child. You can defend her with more or less skill—maybe by angrily lecturing the class about not hurting her feelings, maybe by telling a parable that makes the point more deftly—but the fact is (so it seems) that you need to read the riot act. This is a time when even young children must take some responsibility to avoid causing hurt. Even second grade is not too early to learn the lesson.

Still, you can predict what the effects will be. A few children will get it, maybe. More are just going to "really feel sorry" for the poor kid, making both her and themselves terribly self-conscious. Others will retreat into sullenness. A few will put on a show of care but keep on taunting her behind your back, maybe even with sharper (because hidden) twists of the knife. And she herself will be even more embarrassed and hurt.

Is there any other way? Are there alternative ways to approach the whole situation so that the class begins to learn the right kind of sensitivity and care but does not end up feeling strained or stuck? Think about it. Really, what would *you* do?

The next morning, when their teacher walked into class, all the children were sitting in their seats, some still tittering about the girl who had no hair, while she shrank into her chair. "Good morning, children," the teacher said, smiling warmly in her familiar way of greeting them. She took off her coat and scarf. Her head was completely bald.

After that, a rash of children begged their parents to let them cut their hair. And whenever a child came to class with short hair, newly bobbed, all the children laughed merrily, not out of fear but out of the joy of the game. And everybody's hair grew back at the same time.

How wonderful—and how ethical! This teacher did something transformative and memorable, and far more powerful than a lecture would have been. By shaving her own head, she invited the children into an entirely new way of relating to the child with no hair. She showed them that there is something to do besides gape at her or feel sorry for her. The bald child was

no longer a problem or an object of pity, but a playmate with options, just like she was before. Maybe even better. The possibility of a whole new kind of solidarity (not to mention fun) opens up.

What a creative teacher! Would that all our teachers were like her—would that we were like her ourselves. And in all seriousness: why not? Another kind of ethical learning, not so familiar as systematic and critical skills but arguably just as important, is creative thinking. It turns out to be a genuinely learnable skill, as well. (Don't even *think* of saying, "You can't learn creativity." How do you know until you've tried?)

What if even the most seemingly "stuck" situations have totally unexpected possibilities, ways out or beyond that are far outside the range of options we usually consider? Suppose we could find whole new options or ways of thinking about assisted suicide, or justice, or environmental ethics? What kinds of skills and vision does it take to begin to discover them?

DIALOGUE AND RESPONSIVENESS

Finally, ethics is a learning experience because it invites and requires us to develop our skills at both dialogue and responsiveness to others *in practice*.

It's sad and certainly ironic that we have such trouble talking or debating respectfully and productively about ethical disagreements. Nonetheless, notoriously, we do. Abortion, affirmative action, animal rights, assisted suicide. . . . that's just the A's, and already we have four totally polarized issues on which even otherwise perfectly lovely and reasonable people apparently cannot manage to begin to talk decently to each other. Ironically, it seems that in ethics itself we have great difficulty being ethical: that is, actually listening to one another and honoring our relationship as we work together toward constructive solutions.

Still, as we'll see, these are learnable skills too. Sometimes it doesn't even take two to tango—one is enough. So why not *you*?

Responsiveness also takes some learning. It is not just a matter of feeling sympathy for others, though of course that is a fine start (and also is a skill that improves with practice). As well, it means knowing how to get involved and make a difference: how to make yourself an ethical change-maker and how to join change-making communities.

Many people feel unable to make a difference in a world as complex and fast-changing as ours. Young people, especially, like students, may feel this way. "What can *I* do?" The answer, actually, is: quite a lot. It's just that putting ethics into action in this way takes a little more attention to method and opportunities than we are usually offered. It turns out that there are many ways to do so, some of them not just equally available to young people and students but *more* available to you. Some attention to these will complete your ethical toolbox—anyway, for now!

REPORT FROM MY STUDENTS

I ask my students what they've learned about ethics in the last few years. Only a few say that very little has changed for them. More say that not so much has changed yet, but they're looking forward to it. Most say that they *have* changed, ethically, sometimes in ways they could never have predicted. They travel, for fun maybe, but come back with whole new ideas about life. They learn about some new subject and have to change their ways. They have a friend or a family member who has an accident or a challenged child, and suddenly they have both more sympathy for others and more passion for the moment. Some learn the hard way to see people beyond labels and categories: race categories, sexual orientation, politics. The phrase, "They're people just like me" keeps coming up—something we know (we know the words, anyway) and yet, often, don't quite "know" well enough. This too must actually be learned, perhaps again and again, and not just by young people.

It turns out that the story of ethics itself is continuously unfolding. The idea of rights, for example, which most of us take for granted, is a piece of ethical theory that was literally revolutionary in the 18th century. On July 4 we shoot off fireworks and celebrate the Declaration of Independence as if it were the most natural and obvious thing. But it was a radical document in its time—after all, it started a revolution—and even now we struggle to realize the full promise of "all [people] are created equal."

My students, like you, see new ethical perspectives arising. Instead of Declarations of Independence we are now beginning to see Declarations of *Interdependence*: the insistence that humans are deeply dependent on the rest of the biosphere for health, wealth, and, indeed, our very survival—and that it would therefore be a good idea to treat nature with more respect. "Environmental ethics" itself is a coming field. Forty years ago whales were being slaughtered all over the high seas, and no one recycled anything. Young people now can listen to whale songs on CD, whale hunting is banned (though some still goes on), and recycling bins are everywhere. What's next?

Other unheard-of issues will be coming up, such as an entire range of thorny and unprecedented questions about cloning and genetic engineering. Old issues will come up in new forms, such as questions about privacy rights in an age preoccupied with security. In personal and professional life, "just getting by" by current standards is soon likely to be nowhere near enough. Ethical norms for managers and CEOs are changing so fast that some of yesterday's accepted behavior is already becoming grounds for dismissal, or even jail. New ideals are arising—for work, for the place of older people in a new world, for diversity and tolerance and also for the reaffirmation of certain traditional values. My students, like you, want to be ready. An ethical toolbox should help!

READING 1

“It Was Almost Like Being Born Again”

C. P. ELLIS

AS TOLD TO STUDS TERKEL IN *AMERICAN DREAMS: LOST AND FOUND*

C. P. ELLIS (1927–2005) was a North Carolina segregationist and Ku Klux Klan member who became a civil rights activist and union organizer, through a series of experiences he traces here. Ellis speaks here with Studs Terkel (1912–2008), a beloved broadcaster and oral historian who published many books of interviews like these on innumerable topics with people from all walks of life. This one, from his *American Dreams*, is surely one of his most remarkable.

Ask yourself how Ellis managed to change so much. How does he find his way around the endless temptations and pressures to stay where and what he is? What does he have to *fight* in order to keep on opening his mind? And what has happened by the time he comes to the point of saying, “It was almost like being born again. It was a new life. . . .”?

MY FATHER WORKED in a textile mill in Durham. He died at forty-eight years old. It was probably from cotton dust. Back then, we never heard of brown lung. I was about seventeen years old and had a mother and sister depending on somebody to make a livin’. It was just barely enough insurance to cover his burial. I had to quit school and go to work. I was about eighth grade when I quit.

My father worked hard but never had enough money to buy decent clothes. When I went to school, I never seemed to have adequate clothes to wear. I always left school late afternoon with a sense of inferiority. The other kids had nice clothes, and I just had what Daddy could buy. I still got some of those inferiority feelin’ now that I have to overcome once in a while.

I loved my father. He would go with me to ball games. We’d go fishin’ together. I was really ashamed of the way he’d dress. He would take this money and give it to me instead of putting it on

Excerpt from *American Dreams: Lost and Found*—Copyright © 1980 by Studs Terkel. Reprinted by permission of The New Press.

himself. I always had the feeling about somebody looking at him and makin' fun of him and makin' fun of me. I think it had to do somethin' with my life. . .

All my life, I had work, never a day without work, worked all the overtime I could get and still could not survive financially. I began to say there's somethin' wrong with this country. I worked my butt off and just never seemed to break even.

I was workin' a bread route. The highest I made one week was seventy-five dollars. The rent on our house was about twelve dollars a week. I will never forget: outside of this house was a 265-gallon oil drum, and I never did get enough money to fill up that oil drum. What I would do every night, I would run up to the store and buy five gallons of oil and climb up the ladder and pour it in that 265-gallon drum. I could hear that five gallons when it hits the bottom of that oil drum, splatters, and it sounds like it's nothin' in there. But it would keep the house warm for the night. Next day you'd have to do the same thing.

I left the bread route with fifty dollars in my pocket. I went to the bank and I borrowed four thousand dollars to buy the service station. I worked seven days a week, open and close, and finally had a heart attack. Just about two months before the last payments of that loan. My wife had done the best she could to keep it runnin'. Tryin' to come out of that hole, I just couldn't do it.

I really began to get bitter. I didn't know who to blame. I tried to find somebody. I began to blame it on black people. I had to hate somebody. Hatin' America is hard to do because you can't see it to hate it. You gotta have somethin' to look at to hate. (Laughs.) The natural person for me to hate would be black people, because my father before me was a member of the Klan. As far as he was concerned, it was the savior of the white people. It was the only organization in the world that would take care of the white people. So I began to admire the Klan.

I got active in the Klan while I was at the service station. Every Monday night, a group of men would come by and buy a Coca-Cola, go back to the car, take a few drinks, and come back and stand around talkin'. I couldn't help but wonder: Why are these dudes comin' out every Monday? They said they were with the Klan and have meetings close-by. Would I be interested? Boy, that was an opportunity I really looked forward to! To be part of somethin'. I joined the Klan, went from member to chaplain, from chaplain to vice-president, from vice-president to president. The title is exalted cyclops.

The first night I went with the fellas, they knocked on the door and gave the signal. They sent some robed Klansmen to talk to

me and give me some instructions. I was led into a large meeting room, and this was the time of my life! It was thrilling. Here's a guy who's worked all his life and struggled all his life to be something, and here's the moment to be something. I will never forget it. Four robed Klansmen led me into the hall. The lights were dim, and the only thing you could see was an illuminated cross. I knelt before the cross. I had to make certain vows and promises. We promised to uphold the purity of the white race, fight communism, and protect white womanhood. After I had taken my oath, there was loud applause goin' throughout the buildin', musta been at least four hundred people. For this one little ol' person. It was a thrilling moment for C. P. Ellis. . . .

I can understand why people join extreme right-wing or left-wing groups. They're in the same boat I was. Shut out. Deep down inside, we want to be part of this great society. Nobody listens, so we join these groups. . . .

This was the time when the civil rights movement was really beginnin' to peak. The blacks were beginnin' to demonstrate and picket downtown stores. I never will forget some black lady I hated with a purple passion. Ann Atwater. Every time I'd go downtown, she'd be leadin' a boycott. How I hated—pardon the expression, I don't use it much now—how I just hated that black nigger. (Laughs.) Big, fat, heavy woman. She'd pull about eight demonstrations, and first thing you know they had two, three blacks at the checkout counter. Her and I have had some pretty close confrontations.

I felt very big, yeah. (Laughs.) We're more or less a secret organization. We didn't want anybody to know who we were, and I began to do some thinkin'. What am I hidin' for? I've never been convicted of anything in my life. I don't have any court record. What am I, C. P. Ellis, as a citizen and a member of the United Klansmen of America? Why can't I go to the city council meeting and say: "This is the way we feel about the matter? We don't want you to purchase mobile units to set in our schoolyards. We don't want niggers in our schools."

We began to come out in the open. We would go to the meetings, and the blacks would be there and we'd be there. It was a confrontation every time. I didn't hold back anything. We began to make some inroads with the city councilmen and county commissioners. They began to call us friend. Call us at night on the telephone: "C. P., glad you came to that meeting last night." They didn't want integration either, but they did it secretly, in order to get elected. They couldn't stand up openly and say it, but they were glad somebody was sayin' it. We visited some of the city leaders in their home and talk to 'em privately. It wasn't long before

councilmen would call me up: "The blacks are comin' up tonight and makin' outrageous demands. How about some of you people showin' up and have a little balance?" I'd get on the telephone: "The niggers is comin' to the council meeting tonight. Persons in the city's called me and asked us to be there."

We'd load up our cars and we'd fill up half the council chambers, and the blacks the other half. During these times, I carried weapons to the meetings, outside my belt. We'd go there armed. We would wind up just hollerin' and fussin' at each other. What happened? As a result of our fightin' one another, the city council still had their way. They didn't want to give up control to the blacks nor the Klan. They were usin' us.

I remember one Monday night Klan meeting. I said something was wrong. Our city fathers were using us. And I didn't like to be used. The reactions of the others was not too pleasant: "Let's just keep fightin' them niggers."

I'd go home at night and I'd have to wrestle with myself. I'd look at a black person walkin' down the street, and the guy'd have ragged shoes or his clothes would be worn. That began to do somethin' to me inside. I went through this for about six months. I felt I just had to get out of the Klan. But I wouldn't get out.

Then something happened. The state AFL-CIO received a grant from the Department of HEW, a \$78,000 grant: how to solve racial problems in the school system. I got a telephone call from the president of the state AFL-CIO. "We'd like to get some people together from all walks of life." I said: "All walks of life? Who you talkin' about?" He said: "Blacks, whites, liberals, conservatives, Klansmen, NAACP people."

I said: "No way am I comin' with all those niggers. I'm not gonna be associated with those type of people." A White Citizens Council guy said: "Let's go up there and see what's goin' on. It's tax money bein' spent." I walk in the door, and there was a large number of blacks and white liberals. I knew most of 'em by face 'cause I seen 'em demonstratin' around town. Ann Atwater was there. (Laughs.) I just forced myself to go in and sit down.

The meeting was moderated by a great big black guy who was bushy-headed. (Laughs.) That turned me off. He acted very nice. He said: "I want you all to feel free to say anything you want to say." Some of the blacks stand up and say it's white racism. I took all I could take. I asked for the floor and I cut loose. I said: "No, sir, it's black racism. If we didn't have niggers in the schools, we wouldn't have the problems we got today."

I will never forget. Howard Clements, a black guy, stood up. He said: "I'm certainly glad C. P. Ellis come because he's the most

honest man here tonight.” I said: “What’s that nigger tryin’ to do?” (Laughs.) At the end of that meeting, some blacks tried to come up shake my hand, but I wouldn’t do it. I walked off.

Second night, same group was there. I felt a little more easy because I got some things off my chest. The third night, after they elected all the committees, they want to elect a chairman. Howard Clements stood up and said: “I suggest we elect two co-chairpersons.” Joe Beckton, executive director of the Human Relations Commission, just as black as he can be, he nominated me. There was a reaction from some blacks. Nooo. And, of all things, they nominated Ann Atwater, that big old fat black gal that I had just hated with a purple passion, as co-chairman. I thought to myself: Hey, ain’t no way I can work with that gal. Finally, I agreed to accept it, “cause at this point, I was tired of fightin’, either for survival or against black people or against Jews or against Catholics.

A Klansman and a militant black woman, co-chairmen of the school committee. It was impossible. How could I work with her? But after about two or three days, it was in our hands. We had to make it a success. This give me another sense of belongin’, a sense of pride. This helped this inferiority feelin’ I had. A man who has stood up publicly and said he despised black people, all of a sudden he was willin’ to work with ’em. Here’s a chance for a low-income white man to be somethin’. In spite of all my hatred for blacks and Jews and liberals, I accepted the job. Her and I began to reluctantly work together. (Laughs.) She had as many problems workin’ with me as I had workin’ with her.

One night, I called her: “Ann, you and I should have a lot of differences and we got ’em now. But there’s somethin’ laid out here before us, and if it’s gonna be a success, you and I are gonna have to make it one. Can we lay aside some of these feelin’s?” She said: “I’m willing if you are.” I said: “Let’s do it.”

My old friends would call me at night: “C. P., what the hell is wrong with you? You’re sellin’ out the white race.” This begin to make me have guilt feelin’s. Am I doin’ right? Am I doin’ wrong? Here I am all of a sudden makin’ an about-face and tryin’ to deal with my feelin’s, my heart. My mind was beginnin’ to open up. I was beginnin’ to see what was right and what was wrong. I don’t want the kids to fight forever.

We were gonna go ten nights. By this time, I had went to work at Duke University, in maintenance. Makin’ very little money. Terry Sanford give me this ten days off with pay. He was president of Duke at the time. He knew I was a Klansman and realized the importance of blacks and whites getting along.

I said: "If we're gonna make this thing a success, I've got to get to my kind of people." The low-income whites. We walked the streets of Durham, and we knocked on doors and invited people. Ann was goin' into the black community. They just wasn't respondin' to us when we made these house calls. Some of 'em were cussin' us out. "You're sellin' us out, Ellis, get out of my door. I don't want to talk to you." Ann was gettin' the same response from blacks: "What are you doin' messin' with that Klansman?"

One day, Ann and I went back to the school and we sat down. We began to talk and just reflect. Ann said: "My daughter came home cryin' every day. She said her teacher was makin' fun of me in front of the other kids." I said: "Boy, the same thing happened to my kid. White liberal teacher was makin' fun of Tim Ellis's father, the Klansman. In front of other peoples. He came home cryin'." At this point—he pauses, swallows hard, stifles a sob—I begin to see, here we are, two people from the far ends of the fence, havin' identical problems, except hers bein' black and me bein' white. From that moment on, I tell ya, that gal and I worked together good. I began to love the girl, really. (He weeps.)

The amazing thing about it, her and I, up to that point, had cussed each other, bawled each other, we hated each other. Up to that point, we didn't know each other. We didn't know we had things in common.

We worked at it, with the people who came to these meetings. They talked about racism, sex education, about teachers not bein' qualified. After seven, eight nights of real intense discussion, these people, who'd never talked to each other before, all of a sudden came up with resolutions. It was really somethin', you had to be there to get the tone and feelin' of it.

At that point, I didn't like integration, but the law says you do this and I've got to do what the law says, okay? We said: "Let's take these resolutions to the school board." The most disheartening thing I've ever faced was the school system refused to implement any one of these resolutions. These were recommendations from the people who pay taxes and pay their salaries.

I thought they were good answers. Some of 'em I didn't agree with, but I been in this thing from the beginning, and whatever comes of it, I'm gonna support it. Okay, since the school board refused, I decided I'd just run for the school board.

I spent eighty-five dollars on the campaign. The guy runnin' against me spent several thousand. I really had nobody on my side. The Klan turned against me. The low-income whites turned against me. The liberals didn't particularly like me. The blacks

were suspicious of me. The blacks wanted to support me, but they couldn't muster up enough to support a Klansman on the school board. (Laughs.) But I made up my mind that what I was doin' was right, and I was gonna do it regardless what anybody said.

I was invited to the Democratic women's social hour as a candidate. Didn't have but one suit to my name. Had it six, seven, eight years. I had it cleaned, put on the best shirt I had and a tie. Here were all this high-class wealthy candidates shakin' hands. I walked up to the mayor and stuck out my hand. He give me that handshake with that rag type of hand. He said: "C. P., I'm glad to see you." But I could tell by his handshake he was lyin' to me. This was botherin' me. I know I'm a low-income person. I know I'm not wealthy. I know they were sayin': "What's this little ol' dude runnin' for school board?" Yet they had to smile and make like they're glad to see me. I begin to spot some black people in that room. I automatically went to 'em and that was a firm handshake. They said: "I'm glad to see you, C. P." I knew they meant it—you can tell about a handshake.

Every place I appeared, I said I will listen to the voice of the people. I will not make a major decision until I first contacted all the organizations in the city. I got 4,640 votes. The guy beat me by two thousand. Not bad for eighty-five bucks and no constituency.

The whole world was openin' up, and I was learnin' new truths that I had never learned before. I was beginnin' to look at a black person, shake hands with him, and see him as a human bein'. I hadn't got rid of all this stuff. I've still got a little bit of it. But somethin' was happenin' to me.

It was almost like bein' born again. It was a new life. I didn't have these sleepless nights I used to have when I was active in the Klan and slippin' around at night. I could sleep at night and feel good about it. I'd rather live now than at any other time in history. It's a challenge.

Back at Duke, doin' maintenance, I'd pick up my tools, fix the commode, unstop the drains. But this got in my blood. Things weren't right in this country, and what we done in Durham needs to be told. I was so miserable at Duke, I could hardly stand it. I'd go to work every morning just hatin' to go.

My whole life had changed. I got an eighth-grade education, and I wanted to complete high school. Went to high school in the afternoons on a program called PEP—Past Employment Progress. I was about the only white in class, and the oldest. I begin to read about biology. I'd take my books home at night, 'cause I was determined to get through. Sure enough, I graduated. I got the diploma at home. . . .

Last year, I ran for business manager of the union. He's elected by the workers. The guy that ran against me was black, and our membership is seventy-five percent black. I thought: Claiborne, there's no way you can beat that black guy. People know your background. Even though you've made tremendous strides, those black people are not gonna vote for you. You know how much I beat him? Four to one. (Laughs.)

The company used my past against me. They put out letters with a picture of a robe and a cap: Would you vote for a Klansman? They wouldn't deal with the issues. I immediately called for a mass meeting. I met with the ladies at an electric component plant. I said: "Okay, this is Claiborne Ellis. This is where I come from. I want you to know right now, you black ladies here, I was at one time a member of the Klan. I want you to know, because they'll tell you about it."

I invited some of my old black friends. I said: "Brother Joe, Brother Howard, be honest now and tell these people how you feel about me." They done it. (Laughs.) Howard Clements kidded me a little bit. He said: "I don't know what I'm doin' here, supportin' an ex-Klansman." (Laughs.) He said: I know what C. P. Ellis come from. I knew him when he was. I knew him as he grew, and grewed with him. I'm tellin' you now: follow, follow this Klansman." (He pauses, swallows hard.) "Any questions?" "No," the black ladies said. "Let's get on with the meeting, we need Ellis." (He laughs and weeps.) Boy, black people sayin' that about me. I won one thirty-four to forty-one. Four to one.

It makes you feel good to go into a plant and butt heads with professional union busters. You see black people and white people join hands to defeat the racist issues they use against people. They're tryin' the same things with the Klan. It's still happenin' today. Can you imagine a guy who's got an adult high school diploma runnin' into professional college graduates who are union busters? I gotta compete with 'em. I work seven days a week, nights and on Saturday and Sunday. The salary's not that great, and if I didn't care, I'd quit. But I care and I can't quit. I got a taste of it. (Laughs.)

I tell people there's a tremendous possibility in this country to stop wars, the battles, the struggles, the fights between people. People say: "That's an impossible dream. You sound like Martin Luther King." An ex-Klansman who sounds like Martin Luther King. (Laughs.) I don't think it's an impossible dream. It's happened in my life. It's happened in other people's lives in America.

I don't know what's ahead of me. I have no desire to be a big union official. I want to be right out here in the field with the

workers. I want to walk through their factory and shake hands with that man whose hands are dirty. I'm gonna do all that one little ol' man can do. I'm fifty-two years old, and I ain't got many years left, but I want to make the best of 'em.



FOR REVIEW

1. How does this text define ethics? (Be exact.)
2. What are the three senses in which ethics “takes care”?
3. What is the difference between them?
4. “Remember who you are!” What does this mean?
5. What are “basic needs”?
6. What are “legitimate expectations”?
7. How can systematic thinking serve ethics?
8. How can critical thinking serve ethics?
9. How can creative thinking serve ethics?
10. Give an example of ethical growth in an individual. Why is it ethical? Why is it growth?
11. Give an example of ethical growth in our society. Why is it ethical? Why is it growth?
12. How did C. P. Ellis transform from a committed segregationist to a civil rights activist?



FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1.1 FOR REFLECTION

What experiences and expectations do you bring to the study of ethics? What did you expect when you signed up for this course and first cracked the covers of this book? Are you going to find ethics challenging and inviting in ways you didn't expect? What hopes and fears do you bring to this new study?

What events in your life were occasions for ethical learning? What did you learn? What made that learning possible? How specifically do you think you have changed, morally speaking? How do you expect to change in the future?

Look for biographies or autobiographies of people you admire (and maybe some of people you don't) and pay attention to the ways in which they learned and changed—that is, pay attention to what made learning and change possible for them. Or interview some people you know or could contact, asking the same questions: What have been major ethical changes in your life? Why did those changes happen? Were they hard? Why? How do you feel about them now that you look back at them? What advice do you have for younger people looking ahead to such changes in their own lives?

1.2 LIMBERING UP

Here is a range of varied and probably unexpected questions—just to think about, for now, as we begin a broad and open-ended engagement with ethics, and also specifically to open class discussion or for reflective writing projects. Pick some that interest you. Take them in an open-ended way—*not* to nail down some ethical decision right now, but just to explore with some curiosity and good humor (get in the habit!), discuss with each other, and then hold in mind as we proceed through the book (we will revisit some of them).

■ SEVEN GENERATIONS

What specifically do you think a “seven generations” view might change? Or, to put it another way: What are we doing right now that cannot be sustained for at least seven generations? How would the world look if we stopped doing those things? That is, what are the alternatives?

Try to be imaginative here. Don't just imagine the world without certain unsustainable practices. Consider what an inventive world might do *instead*.

Ask around a bit. For at least a three-generation view, ask your own grandparents what they think. If they are unavailable, or in any case, you can ask some other grandparents. Online you can contact the International Council of the Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers at www.grandmotherscouncil.com. Email them a question.

■ BLIND SPOTS

With today's moral consciousness we look back and wonder how people in the past could have been so morally blind: to racism and sexism, for example, which were simply taken for granted, in the most extreme forms, for centuries. Animal-rights advocates sometimes wonder whether our treatment of other animals will not seem equally unbelievable to future generations. Already it does to some of us.

For decades it was very difficult or impossible for dying people to get morphine to ease or block their sometimes immense pain, even though morphine

has long been known to be the best painkiller available and is very easy to make, and for pennies a pill. Doctors were averse to prescribing it for fear of addiction. In America this aversion arose partly because morphine was indeed overprescribed, especially for injuries during the Civil War. A large number of addicts were created, suffering side effects and withdrawal agonies as a result. Most modern medical sources argue, however, that the risks of addiction can be managed with proper dosing, and that addiction, if it does occur, can be reversed.

In any case, these considerations surely do not apply to dying people. For them, addiction is not an issue. Yet they were denied access as well, and suffered greatly as a result. Again, the question: How could those doctors have been so blind? And it's not over yet. In recent decades, Western doctors have become much more willing to use morphine liberally as a painkiller for dying people—though many argue that we are still not liberal enough. A certain moral prejudice against “drugs” remains, as the continuing unease over medical marijuana also attests. Meanwhile the problem persists in much of the rest of the world, compounded by the unfortunate history of opiates. As *Time* magazine remarks, “in East Asia, where European colonial powers once used opiates to subdue much of the population of Indochina, governments retain an almost pathological aversion to opiates of any kind” (Martha Overland, “Morphine Remains Scarce for Pain Sufferers WorldWide,” *Time*, June 7, 2010, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1993375,00.html>, accessed September 2, 2016. Read the whole article for more). But the consequence is that many people still die in misery.

Of course, one of the paradoxes of blind spots is that the people who have them can't tell. Otherwise they wouldn't be *blind* spots, obviously. Yet we can wonder—we can suspect them indirectly. Surely we are unlikely to be the first generation of people to live with perfectly clear moral vision. We still have blind spots! Knowing this, what do you think they might be? What kinds of moral blindness (not necessarily just about drugs) might still be the accepted wisdom today? Why?

■ DRUGS

Speaking of drugs, here is a (seemingly) much simpler question. What if there were a cheap, legal, “up” hallucinogenic drug that genuinely had no side effects? What moral objections, if any, would remain?

■ SHOULD YOUR DRIVERLESS CAR KILL YOU?

Computer-controlled cars are on the way: vehicles that can drive themselves under most circumstances. This means that they will have to be programmed to make their own choices in a variety of circumstances: under what kinds of conditions to choose to pass, slow down, exceed or not exceed speed limits, and on and on. And: what to do in impending accident situations. When some

collision or accident is inevitable, how should the car decide what to do? If it has the choice, will your autonomous car risk killing you (the driver) or, say, pedestrians on the street?

According to a recent survey,

76% of participants said that it would be more ethical for self-driving cars to sacrifice one passenger rather than kill 10 pedestrians. But just 23% said it would be preferable to sacrifice their passenger when only one pedestrian could be saved. And only 19% they would buy a self-driving car if it meant a family member might be sacrificed for the greater good. (“Ethics Dilemmas May Hold Back Autonomous Cars,” *The Sun*, June 24, 2016, <http://www.thesundaily.my/news/1849631>.)

What do you make of this data? (Read the whole article for more.)

And, by the way, quite apart from your potential autonomous car, what would *you yourself* do faced with such split-second choices? Would you sacrifice yourself to keep from killing a pedestrian? Why or why not?

■ GETTING UNSTUCK?

Take some painful and “stuck” contemporary moral issues—abortion is one but certainly not the only possible example—and deliberately and creatively look for some alternative possible approaches, off the scale of “pro” or “con.” Look for alternative approaches *now*: Are there organizations, say, working on reconciliation, or alternative ways of framing the problem so that it doesn’t come up in so destructive a way? How is abortion, for example, dealt with in societies that do not have the polarized kind of abortion debate we have? (Again, this is *not* an invitation to replay the usual abortion debate. Instead, can you think of any other, very different ethical approaches?) What about, say, welfare dependency? Any types of solutions that are *entirely* different from the usual agenda of cutting benefits and making welfare tougher to get?

■ CREATIVE ANTI-RACISM

Think back to the teacher who shaved her head in solidarity with a young student who was being singled out for having lost her hair to chemotherapy—a dramatic gesture that was also very creative. Now consider the possibilities for this kind of creativity to other instances of injustice and prejudice that you/we regularly encounter. Racism, for example. Can you think of unexpected and dramatic ways to highlight and challenge racial injustice and prejudice?

There might be ways to directly transpose this teacher’s strategy to the problem of racism. (Like what?) But don’t confine yourself just to those. What else might be possible that is off the usual scales? Look around and see what kinds of anti-racism work are already happening, nationally and in your area

as well. What would be creative next steps with some of this work? Does C. P. Ellis's story give you any ideas?

Please note that one of the especially effective features of this teacher's action is that it immediately invited the rest of the class into some visible and appealing alternative. It didn't play on guilt or begin with moralizing, but opened up an entirely different way of seeing. What kinds of actions might have a similar effect when racism is concerned?

■ JUSTICE AS FAIRNESS

Try designing a company without knowing what your own status will be within it. If you don't know whether you'll be a janitor or a CEO, how will you set up your company's decision-making processes? Likewise, if you're really ambitious, try designing a whole economic or political system under the same kind of "veil of ignorance"—without knowing what your role will be once the system is set up. If you don't know whether you'll be a Rockefeller or a disadvantaged minority-group member, a founder or a recent immigrant, a movie star or a bag lady, how will you decide to distribute power? Who will have what kind of decision-making roles? How will your society take care of the needy? Remember, you might be one of them . . . but then again, you might be a well-off suburbanite uninterested in higher taxes.

How does your answer under the "veil of ignorance" differ from your answer when you do know who you are? Which way of asking the question do you think is more ethical? Why?

(This thought-experiment is borrowed from *A Theory of Justice*, a famous book by the ethical and political philosopher John Rawls [1921–2002]. We will return to it in more detail later in **Going Farther** #7. For now, though, don't look ahead—just take it in your own terms and see what emerges from your own thinking and discussion.)

■ ETERNAL LIFE

Imagine that people lived forever. Would that be wonderful? Awful? How would we adjust? Totally switch identities every few hundred years? (Would you want to be the same person forever?) Would some people want out? What about you? What might be some of the effects on ethics as we know it? Would eternal life actually be a good thing?

■ GENERATION STARSHIPS

If humans are to reach potentially habitable planets of even the closest stars, huge starships will probably have to be sent out that will in effect be mini-worlds. The trip may take centuries—and thus multiple generations. After

the first generation, the people who find themselves on this trip will have no choice about it—or about quite a number of other things, such as the need to have children, pursue a fairly small range of jobs, keep the ship running, and so on. This raises all manner of questions, but one ethical question is: Is this fair? By what right do we lock future generations into such a constrained situation, something they did not and cannot choose?

Then again, what really is the difference (*is there a difference?*) between obligating future generations by sending out such a “generation” starship and obligating future generations by, say, knowingly changing the climate? (Suppose the starship takes, say, seven generations.) For that matter, don’t we “obligate” future generations in some sense no matter *what* we do? But if so, are there ethically better and worse forms of such obligations?

Finally, while we’re on such science-fiction topics, how about this one: If we were to have to pick the crew of such a ship—or, let’s say, just one or a few people to represent the human race (or, Earth as a whole), to some alien extraterrestrial civilization, a first envoy to the stars—who should it be? Can you name an individual or a kind of person? Why? Is this an ethical question, at least in part?

NOTES

For more on the “seven generations” idea, see Oren Lyons (b. 1930, Chief of the Onondaga Nation), “An Iroquois Perspective,” in Christopher Vecsey and Robert W. Venables, editors, *American Indian Environments: Ecological Issues in Native American History* (Ithaca, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1994), pp. 173–174. The Constitution, or “Great Binding Law,” of the Iroquois Nations is online at www.indigenouspeople.net/iroqcon.htm (see section 28).

For a good first sense of the range of practical ethics, check out EthicsWeb Canada at <http://www.ethicsweb.ca/resources/>. An excellent though now somewhat dated resource, also including more general philosophical debates and issues, is Lawrence Hinman’s “Ethics Updates” website at ethics.sandiego.edu.



GOING FARTHER #1

TOWARD AN INTERPERSONAL ETHICS

This is the first of eighteen sections in between the chapters of this book that offer ways of “going farther”—as the title says—beyond the offering of the preceding chapter or chapters. Sometimes, as in this first **Going Farther** section, the main content is a reading that extends the chapter in some further direction. Other times it is a more involved exercise than the regular “For Reflection and Discussion” exercises in the chapters proper. Still other **Going Farther** sections offer especially provocative perspectives. Some do all of this at once! Some of them may also be rather more difficult than the regular chapters. Others are just provocatively different. Your instructor may assign some of them along with regular chapters, but of course nothing stops you from reading some or all of them whether assigned or not!

Going Farther #1 will give you a taste of the philosophy of ethics: a taste of the “meta-ethical” ideas that lie behind this book. Broadly speaking, those ideas are *pragmatic*—but this term is used by philosophers in somewhat different ways than it is used in popular and journalistic writing today. The American pragmatist John Dewey (1859–1952) challenged the traditional idea that ethical problems are a kind of puzzle that needs to be solved. On the traditional view, the very point of ethics is to judge actions. For Dewey, by contrast, the point of ethics is to actually improve the world. It is to apply intelligence in a constructive way to what Dewey called “problematic situations”—not some kind of intellectual puzzle, but a large and unsettled region of values in possibly productive tension.

This is why this book offers a large and varied toolbox. Traditional ethical theories have a role, to be sure, but here they will not be presented as contenders for the one great moral truth; rather, simply as one way to help us spell out and understand some of the values at stake. Meanwhile, most importantly, a great many *other* skills and understandings also are essential for intelligently and constructively engaging the moral problems and challenges of the day, as we have just seen, such as critical thinking, dialogue skills, creative problem-solving, and moral vision.

Another inspiration for this book’s approach is feminist ethics. Within feminist philosophy generally, ethics naturally takes many forms, but common themes include valuing the traditionally devalued realms identified with women, especially children and family, while at the same time aiming to free women from being restricted to and by them; the importance of caring and relationships (not just, or mainly, independence and freedom); and the tending of those relationships in all their concreteness and variety. (More on this in chapter 8.)

Ethics on both views is fundamentally a way of staying connected and working things out together. It begins—surprise!—with *paying attention*. It moves readily and naturally to various other forms of what we have called *taking care*. Ethics on this understanding is not apt to make sweeping judgments of classes of actions from a supposedly impartial and uninvolved standpoint, but rather to work from inside and propose tentative and partial judgments, and sometimes no judgment at all, so much as reshaping problems so

that they come up in more manageable forms in the first place, or perhaps do not come up at all.

Neither feminists nor pragmatists, moreover, are necessarily persuaded that the way the world is at present is the only way it can be. Some of our ethical (and other) problems come up because of the kind of world we have built, and the power relations within it (including, but not only, between the sexes). The best answer therefore may well be to *change the world!*

READING 2

Selections from “*Moral Understandings*”

MARGARET URBAN WALKER

MARGARET URBAN WALKER (b. 1948) is Professor of Philosophy at Marquette University. She has also taught at Arizona State University, Fordham University, and the Catholic University of Leuven, where she was awarded the Cardinal Mercier chair at the Catholic University of Leuven in 2002, the first woman ever to hold that position.

In these brief excerpts from her influential 1989 article “Moral Understandings,” Walker contrasts two general conceptions of ethics. One she calls the “universalist/impersonalist tradition” or “standard model” of ethics. This model pictures individuals “standing before the bar of impersonal truth.” Contrasted to this is a conception of ethics that is neither impersonal nor merely personal, but, as she puts it, interpersonal. As a conception with strong feminist and pragmatist roots, this second view is the one that underlies the approach in this book.

Walker’s article “Moral Understandings” later became a book, *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics* (2nd edition, Oxford University Press, 2007). For another ambitious contrast of “standard models” of ethics with alternative feminist and multicultural perspectives, see James Sterba’s collection *Ethics: Classical Western Texts in Feminist and Multicultural Perspectives* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

In the words of . . . the nineteenth-century utilitarian philosopher Henry Sidgwick, the goal [of ethics] is systematization of moral understanding, and its ideal of system is that of “precise general

Selections from Margaret Urban Walker, “Moral Understandings,” *Hypatia* 4 (2): 15–28. © 1989 by Hypatia, Inc. John Wiley & Sons Inc.

knowledge of what ought to be" (1907, 1), encoded in "directive rules of conduct" (2) which are "clear and decisive" (199) and "in universal form" (228). The rationale for pursuing a "scientifically complete and systematically reflective form" (425) in morals is that it "corrects" and "supplements" our scattered intuitions, and resolves "uncertainties and discrepancies" in moral judgment. By useful abstraction it steers us away from, in Sidgwick's words, "obvious sources of error" which "disturb the clearness" of moral discernment (214). For Sidgwick, such distractions include complexity of circumstances, personal interests, and habitual sympathies. Thus, according to Sidgwick, only precise and truly universal principles can provide for "perfection of practice no less than for theoretical completeness" (262).

This capsule description of standard intent and methodology aims to bring into relief its very general picture of morality as individuals standing before the bar of impersonal truth. Moral responsibility is envisioned as responsiveness to the impersonal truths in which morality resides, each individual stands justified if he or she can invoke the authority of this impersonal truth, and the moral community of individuals is secured by the conformity (and uniformity) guaranteed by obedience to this higher authority.

. . . The alternative view will not be one of individuals standing singly before the impersonal dicta of Morality, but one of human beings connected in various ways and at various depths responding to *each other* by engaging together in a search for shareable interpretations of their responsibilities, and/or bearable resolutions to their moral binds. These interpretations and resolutions will be constrained not only by how well they protect goods we can share, but also by how well they preserve the very human connections that make the shared process necessary and possible. The long oscillation in Western moral thought between the impersonal and the personal viewpoints is answered by proposing that we consider, fully and in earnest, the *interpersonal* view.

The result . . . is not, then, an "opposite number" or shadow image of impersonalist approaches, it is instead a point of departure for a *variety* of different problematics, investigations, focal concerns, and genres of writing and teaching about ethics . . . These endeavors can, however, be carried out in a cheerfully piecemeal fashion, we need not expect or require the results to eventuate in a comprehensive systematization.

. . . Moral problems on this view are nodal points in progressive histories of mutual adjustment and understanding, not "cases" to be closed by a final verdict of a highest court.

From the alternative view, moral understanding comprises a collection of perceptive, imaginative, appreciative, and expressive

skills and capacities which put and keep us in unimpeded contact with the realities of ourselves and specific others. . . .

The alternative picture also invites us not to be too tempted by the “separate spheres” move of endorsing particularism for personal or intimate relations, universalism for the large-scale or genuinely administrative context, or for dealings with unknown or little-known persons. While principled, generalized treatments may really be the best we can resort to in many cases of the latter sort, it is well to preserve a lively sense of the *moral incompleteness* or inadequacy of these resorts. This is partly to defend ourselves against dispositions to keep strangers strange and outsiders outside, but it is also to prevent our becoming comfortable with essentially distancing, depersonalizing, or paternalistic attitudes which may not really *be* the only resorts if roles and institutions can be shaped to embody expressive and communicative possibilities. It is often claimed that more humanly responsive institutions are not practical (read instrumentally efficient). But if moral-practical intelligence is understood consistently in the alternative way discussed (the way appropriate to relations among persons), it may instead be correct to say that certain incorrigibly impersonal or depersonalizing institutions are too morally impractical to be tolerated. It is crucial to examine how structural features of institutionalized relations—medical personnel, patients and families, teachers, students and parents, case workers and clients, for example—combine with typical situations to enable or deform the abilities of all concerned to hear and to be heard. Some characteristically modern forms of universalist thinking may project a sort of “moral colonialism” (the “subjects” of my moral decisions disappear behind uniform “policies” I must impartially “apply”) precisely because they were forged historically with an eye to actual colonization—industrial or imperial.

Finally, this kind of [view] reminds us that styles of moral thinking are not primarily philosophical brain-teasers, data begging for the maximally elegant theoretical construction, but are ways of answering to *other people* in terms of some responsibilities that are commonly recognized or recognizable in some community.

Sedgwick, Henry (1981) [1907]. *The Methods of Ethics*. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 7th ed.



GOING FARTHER #2

TWO VIEWS OF ETHICS AND OTHER ANIMALS

Going Farther #2 offers two readings on the subject of the human relation to other animals. Both readings aim to place the eating of animals, in particular, into a larger moral context, to take a larger perspective. You will see that they are very different perspectives! As with the various challenges and topics in Exercise 1.2, take these as an occasion for exploration, not to decide anything or to defend one view against the other. Instead, try to make sense of both, attending to and appreciating the points and the perspectives that you might *not* have thought of before. After the first reading I will suggest some ways to interpret it as a moral perspective—then, for the second, you are on your own.

READING 3

“Am I Blue?”

ALICE WALKER

ALICE WALKER (b. 1944) is an American novelist, short story writer, poet, and activist best known as the author of *The Color Purple*, though she has penned other fine novels too, as well as numerous books of reflective and autobiographical essays. She is certainly not the first storyteller to weigh in on ethical matters. Some have even started moral revolutions. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*—the best-selling novel of the 19th century—inspired the anti-slavery movement. Aldo Leopold’s *Sand County Almanac* jump-started modern environmental ethics (there is a selection in Reading 21). In general, stories and essays can be powerful ways to bring basic needs and legitimate expectations into view,

“Am I Blue?” from *LIVING BY THE WORD: SELECTED WRITINGS 1973–1987* by Alice Walker. Copyright © 1986 by Alice Walker. Reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company. All rights reserved.

even—maybe especially—where we’ve had trouble seeing them before.

Here is a well-known essay in which Walker struggles with several ethical issues: with the fate of a horse who has become a distant sort of friend, with her commitment to fighting oppression of all sorts, and ultimately, in the very last lines, with diet as an ethical issue. They come together in unexpected and uneasy ways—and she doesn’t flinch.

*“Ain’t these tears in these eyes tellin’ you?”**

For about three years my companion and I rented a small house in the country that stood on the edge of a large meadow that appeared to run from the end of our deck straight into the mountains. The mountains, however, were quite far away, and between us and them there was, in fact, a town. It was one of the many pleasant aspects of the house that you never really were aware of this.

It was a house of many windows, low, wide, nearly floor to ceiling in the living room, which faced the meadow, and it was from one of these that I first saw our closest neighbor, a large white horse, cropping grass, flipping its mane, and ambling about—not over the entire meadow, which stretched well out of sight of the house, but over the five or so fenced-in acres that were next to the twenty-odd that we had rented. I soon learned that the horse, whose name was Blue, belonged to a man who lived in another town, but was boarded by our neighbors next door. Occasionally, one of the children, usually a stocky teen-ager, but sometimes a much younger girl or boy, could be seen riding Blue. They would appear in the meadow, climb up on his back, ride furiously for ten or fifteen minutes, then get off, slap Blue on the flanks, and not be seen again for a month or more.

There were many apple trees in our yard, and one by the fence that Blue could almost reach. We were soon in the habit of feeding him apples, which he relished, especially because by the middle of summer the meadow grasses—so green and succulent since January—had dried out from lack of rain, and Blue stumbled about munching the dried stalks half-heartedly. Sometimes he would stand very still just by the apple tree, and when one of us came out he would whinny, snort loudly, or stamp the ground. This meant, of course: I want an apple.

It was quite wonderful to pick a few apples, or collect those that had fallen to the ground overnight, and patiently hold them, one by

one, up to his large, toothy mouth. I remained as thrilled as a child by his flexible dark lips, huge, cubelike teeth that crunched the apples, core and all, with such finality, and his high, broad-breasted *enormity*; beside which, I felt small indeed. When I was a child, I used to ride horses, and was especially friendly with one named Nan until the day I was riding and my brother deliberately spooked her and I was thrown, head first, against the trunk of a tree. When I came to, I was in bed and my mother was bending worriedly over me; we silently agreed that perhaps horseback riding was not the safest sport for me. Since then I have walked, and prefer walking to horseback riding—but I had forgotten the depth of feeling one could see in horses' eyes.

I was therefore unprepared for the expression in Blue's. Blue was lonely. Blue was horribly lonely and bored. I was not shocked that this should be the case; five acres to tramp by yourself, endlessly, even in the most beautiful of meadows—and his was—cannot provide many interesting events, and once rainy season turned to dry that was about it. No, I was shocked that I had forgotten that human animals and nonhuman animals can communicate quite well; if we are brought up around animals as children we take this for granted. By the time we are adults we no longer remember. However, the animals have not changed. They are in fact *completed* creations (at least they seem to be, so much more than we) who are not likely to change; it is their nature to express themselves. What else are they going to express? And they do. And, generally speaking, they are ignored.

After giving Blue the apples, I would wander back to the house, aware that he was observing me. Were more apples not forthcoming then? Was that to be his sole entertainment for the day? My partner's small son had decided he wanted to learn how to piece a quilt; we worked in silence on our respective squares as I thought . . .

Well, about slavery: about white children, who were raised by black people, who knew their first all-accepting love from black women, and then, when they were twelve or so, were told they must "forget" the deep levels of communication between themselves and "mammy" that they knew. Later they would be able to relate quite calmly, "My old mammy was sold to another good family." "My old mammy was _____." Fill in the blank. Many more years later a white woman would say: "I can't understand these Negroes, these blacks. What do they want? They're so different from us."

And about the Indians, considered to be "like animals" by the "settlers" (a very benign euphemism for what they actually were), who did not understand their description as a compliment.

And about the thousands of American men who marry Japanese, Korean, Filipina, and other non-English-speaking women and of how happy they report they are, "*blissfully*," until their brides learn to speak English, at which point the marriages tend to fall

apart. What then did the men see, when they looked into the eyes of the women they married, before they could speak English? Apparently only their own reflections.

I thought of society's impatience with the young. "Why are they playing the music so loud?" Perhaps the children have listened to much of the music of oppressed people their parents danced to before they were born, with its passionate but soft cries for acceptance and love, and they have wondered why their parents failed to hear.

I do not know how long Blue had inhabited his five beautiful, boring acres before we moved into our house; a year after we had arrived—and had also traveled to other valleys, other cities, other worlds—he was still there.

But then, in our second year at the house, something happened in Blue's life. One morning, looking out the window at the fog that lay like a ribbon over the meadow, I saw another horse, a brown one, at the other end of Blue's field. Blue appeared to be afraid of it, and for several days made no attempt to go near. We went away for a week. When we returned, Blue had decided to make friends and the two horses ambled or galloped along together, and Blue did not come nearly as often to the fence underneath the apple tree.

When he did, bringing his new friend with him, there was a different look in his eyes. A look of independence, of self-possession, of inalienable *horseness*. His friend eventually became pregnant. For months and months there was, it seemed to me, a mutual feeling between me and the horses of justice, of peace. I fed apples to them both. The look in Blue's eyes was one of unabashed "this is *itness*."

It did not, however, last forever. One day, after a visit to the city, I went out to give Blue some apples. He stood waiting, or so I thought, though not beneath the tree. When I shook the tree and jumped back from the shower of apples, he made no move. I carried some over to him. He managed to half-crunch one. The rest he let fall to the ground. I dreaded looking into his eyes—because I had of course noticed that Brown, his partner, had gone—but I did look. If I had been born into slavery, and my partner had been sold or killed, my eyes would have looked like that. The children next door explained that Blue's partner had been "put with him" (the same expression that old people used, I had noticed, when speaking of an ancestor during slavery who had been impregnated by her owner) so that they could mate and she conceive. Since that was accomplished, she had been taken back by her owner, who lived somewhere else.

Will she be back? I asked.

They didn't know.

Blue was like a crazed person. Blue *was*, to me, a crazed person. He galloped furiously, as if he were being ridden, around and around

his five beautiful acres. He whinnied until he couldn't. He tore at the ground with his hooves. He butted himself against his single shade tree. He looked always and always toward the road down which his partner had gone. And then, occasionally, when he came up for apples, or I took apples to him, he looked at me. It was a look so piercing, so full of grief, a look so *human*, I almost laughed (I felt too sad to cry) to think there are people who do not know that animals suffer. People like me who have forgotten, and daily forget, all that animals try to tell us. "Everything you do to us will happen to you; we are your teachers, as you are ours. We are one lesson" is essentially it, I think. There are those who never once have even considered animals' rights: those who have been taught that animals actually want to be used and abused by us, as small children "love" to be frightened, or women "love" to be mutilated and raped. . . . They are the great-grandchildren of those who honestly thought, because someone taught them this: "Women can't think," and "niggers can't faint." But most disturbing of all, in Blue's large brown eyes was a new look, more painful than the look of despair: the look of disgust with human beings, with life; the look of hatred. And it was odd what the look of hatred did. It gave him, for the first time, the look of a beast. And what that meant was that he had put up a barrier within to protect himself from further violence; all the apples in the world wouldn't change that fact.

And so Blue remained, a beautiful part of our landscape, very peaceful to look at from the window, white against the grass. Once a friend came to visit and said, looking out on the soothing view: "And it *would* have to be a *white* horse; the very image of freedom." And I thought, yes, the animals are forced to become for us merely "images" of what they once so beautifully expressed. And we are used to drinking milk from containers showing "contented" cows, whose real lives we want to hear nothing about, eating eggs and drumsticks from "happy" hens, and munching hamburgers advertised by bulls of integrity who seem to command their fate.

As we talked of freedom and justice one day for all, we sat down to steaks. I am eating misery, I thought, as I took the first bite. And spit it out.

ETHICAL OPENINGS IN "AM I BLUE?"

What are the chief moral values that Alice Walker invokes in this essay? How does she speak to basic needs and legitimate expectations? What does she—and what does Blue, through her—tell us about ethics? Whether we agree with her or not is not the question right now: let us simply try to understand her essay as an ethical expression.

Some values are named in the essay. Justice, in particular, is invoked explicitly: "There was a different look in his eyes. A look of independence, of self-possession, of inalienable horseness. . . . For months and months there was a feeling of justice, of peace." Like any creature, Blue has basic needs and expectations, and for these few months, they are met. "Justice" is that sense of things being right, the world being rightly ordered. He's able to truly be what he is.

But Blue is a horse, of course, not a human, and so we may wonder whether ethics, strictly speaking, even applies. Some people think that only human needs and expectations are relevant to ethics. Walker is clearly out to argue the opposite. All the way through the essay, she draws parallels between the suffering of animals and the suffering of oppressed humans. We're invited to see the owners' treatment of Blue—and, by extension, it seems, much human treatment of all animals—as another kind of oppression. And overcoming oppression and reducing suffering are understood to be key moral values, though not stated explicitly.

Look at the title again, for example. Am I Blue? Or more exactly, what would happen if we saw ourselves in the fate and treatment of this horse? What would change? What would *have to change*?

Walker also draws parallels between our denials of the suffering of animals and our denials of the suffering of oppressed humans. And so something else is going on beneath her explicit appeal to justice and the implicit appeal to reduce suffering: it's an appeal to all of us to pay attention to the sufferings of others, especially those others whose suffering we have learned to deny (or perhaps, worse, *need* to deny in order to go on living as we do, eating meat, for example). We need to take more care at least to look.

Another moral value here, then, is something like sympathy—real, compassionate attention, especially to those so oppressed and stereotyped that we usually give ourselves excuses not to notice. We need to commit ourselves to no longer "ignore" what animals, or any suffering beings, really express. You could also call it honesty—with ourselves—about what is really happening. Walker puts it very personally. Chilled by the sense that Blue has retreated from her, that he has taken on a "disgust" with human beings, we sense that she pulls away too, but still with the hope that we may find ways of being able to look into animals' eyes (if not Blue's, then some animals, sometime) without shame, without a sense of having failed them. With a kind of sympathy that has made a difference. The ideal is that someday we may be able to come into the larger-than-human world with a sense of mutuality and, again, peace.

Sympathizing can be tricky. Sometimes we respond to the sufferings of others by imagining how we would feel if we were them—which is laudable as far as it goes, but also has the danger of imagining that the other (person or creature) is really just like us. It doesn't allow for *difference*. That disturbing story about American men who marry non-English-speaking wives, for instance. The very possibility that they might have something of their own to communicate is often denied. Too often we see only our own reflections in those we subordinate and oppress. I think this is why Walker is careful to acknowledge Blue in what she calls his "inalienable horseness" and "his high, broad-breasted enormity." He's a horse, not a human, but that does not somehow disqualify him from ethical consideration: rather, it qualifies him in his own horsey way.

And so Walker ends with the decision not to eat meat. Indeed she has made herself a major advocate for animal-rights causes and meat-free diets. It is interesting to compare her approach with the usual arguments for vegetarianism. Her argument is certainly not from "animal rights," for example, which is a general, formal, or detached way of arguing—though certainly important and challenging as well. Walker works on a

more personal and sympathetic level. Ultimately, for her, it is a question of how we can live with other animals and other humans, rather than exploiting them and denying any connection: so it is truly a question of mutuality and community.

It's important to acknowledge, finally, that you or I might have responded differently. After all, there's no direct connection between how Blue was treated and the production of steaks. But Walker's essay follows a much bigger track. By compelling us to see Blue as a real, feeling being, she raises both the question of animals in general and the question of our own moral defensiveness in an unforgettable way. It is now, unavoidably, one of the ethical questions of the times. If this brief exploration of "Am I Blue?" has done its work, you can begin to see why.

READING 4

Selections from *Bloodties: Nature, Culture, and the Hunt*

TED KERASOTE

TED KERASOTE is a naturalist and outdoorsperson also struggling with the question of the human relation to animals. He is author of numerous articles and a variety of books in these areas. *Bloodties*, in particular, is an exploration of hunting in many varied forms, from aboriginal hunters in Greenland to globe-trotting trophy hunters, but he ends back at home, with his own hunting practice.

Kerasote is as reflectively autobiographical, and seriously ethical, as Walker. He even holds many of the same values—but he ends up in a very different place. Read Kerasote's thoughts in the same spirit that you read Walker's. (I will leave the further analysis to you and your classmates.) What specific moral values does he invoke? How do they compare with Walker's? Certain values he makes explicit: reducing pain, for instance; responsibility (in hunting, specifically, but also in thinking through our impact on the earth in general); respect for life. Ask yourself how he shows these values, but ask yourself too if there isn't something still deeper in his commitment to hunting, harder to express but vital to his practice. Notice how lovingly he speaks of his high Wyoming home country, "still singing of glaciers and big mammals." Like Walker, he too ends by writing of sympathy, but does he mean the same thing by it?

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Slowly, she angles away from me. In a few more steps she will be gone from sight and down the steep north slope. In the many miles walked this fall, among all the elk I've seen, she has become the possible elk—the elk approached with care, the elk close to home, the elk seen far enough into the season so that soon the season will be over . . . the elk whom the morning, the snow, and the elk themselves have allowed me to approach. Only the asking remains.

"Mother elk," I say. "Please stop." I speak the words in my mind, sending them through the trees and into her sleek brown head. She crosses an opening in the forest, and there, for no reason I can understand, she pauses, her shoulder and flank visible.

It is a clear shot, though not a perfect one—I have to stand at full height to make it. But I know I can make it and I say, "Thankyou. I am sorry." Still I hesitate, for though I can lose myself in the hunting, I have never been able to stop thinking about its results—that I forget it's *this* elk rather than *that* elk who is about to die; that it's *this* creature whom I'm about to take from the world rather than some number in an equation proving the merits of wild-food harvesting over being a supermarket vegetarian; that this being before me—who sees, who smells, who *knows*—will no longer be among us, so that I may go on living. And I don't know how to escape this incongruous pain out of which we grow, this unresolvable unfairness, other than saying that I would rather be caught in this lovely tragedy with those whom I love, whom the ground beneath my feet has created alongside me, than with those far away, whose deaths I cannot own. Not that I think all this. I know it in my hesitation.

Still she stands, strangely immobile. I raise the rifle, and still she stands, and still I wait, for there have been times that I have come to this final moment, and through the air the animal's spirit has flown into my heart, sending me its pride and defiance, or its beseeching, frightened voice, saying, "I am not for you." And I have watched them walk away. She sweeps her eye across the forest and begins to graze down the north slope, exposing her flank for one more instant, and allowing me to decide. I listen, hearing the air thrum with the ambivalence of our joining, about which I can only say, once again, "I am sorry." As she disappears from sight, I fire behind her left shoulder, the sound of the shot muffled by the forest.

Then she's gone, and the woods are alive with the sound of hooves and branches crashing. I run forward, seeing a dozen cows and an enormous six-point bull stream from the pines and climb into the upper meadow, full of aspen. They pause and look back

at me, but I can't see the elk I fired at. For one instant I think of shooting another cow as they stand and stare—the easiest shot imaginable. But I know I hit the animal I shot at.

As I start forward, the elk wheel and run up through the white trees, their tan rumps bobbing. Then they disappear into the next stand of conifers. In a few more steps I see an elk lying in the swale below me, her legs tucked under her, her head erect. She jumps up and moves off at an ungainly trot. I fire, and miss, and she disappears behind a small knob of pines that juts into the aspen.

I climb over several fallen trees and find her lying not thirty feet away, her head turned over her left shoulder, great brown eyes utterly calm. My heart tears apart. . . .

She kicks several more times, gasps once, and lies still, a great, reddish-brown creature, her rear legs straight, her front ones tucked under her. There isn't a speck of blood anywhere. . . .

It takes about an hour to skin her, and as she passes under my hands I note what she is as food—the layer of white fat on her hips, which is good for frying pancakes and for mixing into pemmican; the steaks decreasing in tenderness from the loins to her rump; the burger, jerky, kabob, and sausage. I smile because I can feel saliva lubricating my mouth. Going in the other direction, I smell what she has been—her hair smells of pine, her meat of grass, her fat like the undersides of rocks.

Then I saw her into quarters, the hardest job, and warmest. I'm down to my shirt as the sun begins to shine into our snowy north-facing dell, and the temperature feels as if it finally goes above zero. I hang her two hindquarters in a nearby aspen that has been tilted over by the wind. I also hang her shoulders there, and put each side of her rib cage on a downed aspen. Then I fold the hide and place it alongside the rib cage. The liver and heart I bury in the snow so the Canadian jays, will leave them alone.

I wash my hands with snow, have another cup of tea, then I take her hooves and place them on a nearby rise that looks north across the valley. I place her head on top of her legs. Her eyes have sunken a bit forward and are no longer wide and glistening. Sometimes I have used the head, boiling off its meat and eating the tongue. Today I don't. Kneeling by her hooves and head, I stroke her long brown hair and say a few more words. . . .

Bullfighting, cockfighting, dogfighting . . . shooting live pigeons and prairie dogs for "sport" and money . . . dropping cosmetics into rabbits' eyes so humans can have nonirritating and frivolous products . . . keeping calves in stalls for tender veal, and chickens in crowded, filthy boxes to increase production . . . wounding elk

through carelessness—all of these examples, and thousands of others whose common denominator is disrespect, seemed to me to be gratuitous forms of pain that are best removed from the world. Different from them is the instrumental pain caused by the honest biological clamor of our guts' wanting to be fed and which seems irreducible.

Once, in an attempt to outwit this pain, I became a vegetarian, and stayed one for quite a while. But when I inquired about the lives lost on a mechanized farm, I realized what costs we pay at the supermarket. One Oregon farmer told me that half the cottontail rabbits went into his combine when he cut a wheat field, that virtually all of the small mammals, ground birds, and reptiles were killed when he harvested windrow crops like rye and sugar beets, and that when the leaves were stripped from bush beans all the mice and the snakes who were living among them were destroyed as well. Perhaps he exaggerated; certainly he hadn't taken a census of his fields' small-animal populations. Nonetheless, from boyhood, he had seen many animals being killed as he made America's food. Because most of these animals have been seen as expendable, or not seen at all, few scientific studies have been done measuring agriculture's effects on their populations. Those that have been done demonstrate that agricultural lands often act as "ecological traps," attracting birds, for instance, who begin their nesting only to have machinery pass over the land, destroying their nests and often the birds themselves. This is particularly true in the case of alfalfa, grown to feed livestock, but it also happens in corn, soybean, and spring wheat fields. When one factors in the lives lost to pesticides, the toll is enormous. . . .

. . . And as one biologist told me, when you find dead birds, you're only finding what's been "hit over the head with a baseball bat." You don't see, except after several years, the decline in reproduction among these bird populations, which these pesticides also cause. Raised on a farm in Iowa, he went on to say that current agricultural practices, particularly combining, left the earth a "biological desert." Our fields might be brimming over with wheat and corn and soybeans, but unless we began to leave habitat for wildlife—stubble, hedgerows, and ditches—we were going to find ourselves in an austere quiet world, as silent as the silent spring about which Rachel Carson warned . . . unless one counted the growl of tractors as song.

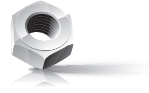
Such data, scanty as it is, addresses only the lives lost on the farm itself. When our produce is transported along the interstate highway system, birds . . . deer . . . skunks . . . raccoons all get flattened. Who hasn't witnessed the carnage? And this doesn't even

begin to count the animals lost to the development of the oil fields themselves, the transportation of petroleum across tundra, mountain ranges, and the oceans, and in the wars fought over that oil. In short, being a supermarket vegetarian didn't take me out of the web in which animals are constantly dying to feed humans, it merely put their deaths over the horizon, making them, in the bloodless jargon of cost-accounting, externalities.

When I looked into that web, so full of pain, I came to see that my killing an elk each year did less harm, expressed in animal lives who I believe count equally, than importing the same amount of vegetable food to my bioregion. That didn't ease my conscience; but it did make the choices clearer. . . .

. . . I'm attached to these cold places, still singing of glaciers and big mammals, and in my bones I know that farming has abandoned a connection to them, a relationship of provision by uncultivated land, and concern for that land by its inhabitants, that seems clearest while hunting well. I decided to go back to hunting because it attaches me to this place and the animals I love, asking me to own what each of us ought to own in some personal way—the pain that runs the world. And hunting elk in particular because they are the loved totem of my home . . . because this home makes them and leaves them free . . . and because eating them does nothing to increase the aggregate pain of the world. In fact, by attaching me lovingly here, the relationship between elk and me decreases it.

All of this I have known most keenly walking in this forest, with the wind in my face, and pine in my nostrils, and snow under my boots. None of which means that someone else, trying the same experiment, would have reached a similar conclusion about how to treat animals. In the end, I think you have to *listen*, and if you can't *listen* to the quiet sadness of this world, a lifetime of roaming the outdoors, or thinking in libraries, is not going to tell you that the country is you and you are it, and when you cause it to suffer needlessly then you have broken a cord of sympathy, which is a much more demanding tie to nature than any system of ethics.



Ethical Short-Circuits (and How to Avoid Them)

Ethics is challenging as well as inviting. It can be difficult, complex, and sometimes downright painful. Familiar and even cherished pictures of the world may have to give way to something new and uncertain; simple pictures may have to be replaced with more complex ones, and relationships rethought. Because ethical engagement with others is itself already an ethical act, it brings challenges too: to listen well, to acknowledge, to accept vulnerability and loss at times, to aim high, and to sustain hope even when things seem dark.

Because of these challenges, there are also natural temptations to avoid ethics, at least at times, instead of embracing it. There are even some time-honored and subtle ways to do so. Still, these are what we could call *short-circuits*.

When a light bulb, say, is “shorted out,” it means that electricity is not getting to it because it found another route instead—maybe to the ground or maybe back to the beginning of the circuit full force. In electrical circuits, this is a bad thing. Short-circuits cause blow-outs or even fires—and in the meantime, you are usually still in the dark.

Something similar happens in ethics. Certain moves can deprive ethical thinking of energy and attention, leaving us “in the dark,” stuck and stubborn, on purpose unengaged—though we may not admit as much to ourselves. For our next step into the study of ethics, we must survey some of the most tempting of these ethical short-circuits, and consider how to resist and avoid them as well.

FLYING BY INSTINCT

The shortest of ethical short-circuits is to simply leave ethical thinking out entirely. It is simply not to think at all.

Go with the flow, fly by instinct, follow your feelings. It may mean taking the path of least resistance, or simply doing what’s easy or familiar or popular or profitable without a second thought.

Feeling is part of the story—of course. Care, concern, and passion are part of what make ethics so engaging and so compelling. Even instinct plays a role. Sometimes feelings and instincts alert us to moral problems that we might otherwise paper over with excuses. Feelings like these can even start moral revolutions. The arguments come later.

Still, we must also examine and temper our feelings, even the strongest feelings. Take prejudice. To be prejudiced may be to have a strong negative feeling about someone because they are of a different ethnicity or gender or age or social class from yourself. If ethics were just a matter of feelings, then there would be nothing to say against such prejudices. It would be perfectly moral to discriminate against people you don't like.

Feeling may say yes. Ethics says no. Ethics instead asks us to challenge these very feelings. "Prejudice" literally means "prejudgment": it is one way of not really paying attention. But we *need* to pay attention. We need to ask why we feel as we do, whether our beliefs and feelings are true or fair, how we would feel in the other person's shoes, and so on. In short, we need to ask whether our feelings are *justified*—and when not, what alternative feelings might be.

Instincts and feelings may also oversimplify complex situations. We want things to feel clear-cut even when they are not, and so we may persuade ourselves that they really are. Mindful thinking, by contrast, is more patient. Where things are really unclear, in particular, feeling may even have to wait. Premature clarity is worse than confusion. We may have to live with some questions a long time before we can decide how we ought to feel about them.

Our feelings are also easily manipulated. For instance, it is easy to be swayed either way by "loaded language," language that plays upon our emotional reactions. Define abortion as "baby-killing" and you create a negative feeling that closes the case against abortion before it really can even be opened. On the other hand, if you describe abortion as no more than "minor surgery," you suggest that it is both unintrusive and even healthy. Either way, we are led into a prepackaged emotional commitment without ever thinking it through. Habit and conformity take over.

Mindful thinking, by contrast, is more complex and open-ended. It is in this spirit that ethics approaches controversial issues of the day, like abortion or professional ethics or assisted suicide. We do want to honor life, for instance. But we don't necessarily think that life should be prolonged under all circumstances, either. Should people be allowed to request medical help in dying, then? Or would this violate the spirit of medicine itself? Could assisted suicide be allowed sometimes and not others? Why? How do you decide? Questions like these cannot be adequately answered by consulting your preexisting feelings. There are too many different possibilities, too many different opinions and prejudices (on all sides) that need to be sorted out carefully.

OFFHAND SELF-JUSTIFICATION

Apart from not thinking at all, the next easiest way to short-circuit ethical thinking is to think as little as possible. Imagine, for example, that I offer some view in a moral discussion. I endorse assisted suicide, maybe. Someone challenges me. My natural first reaction may be to defend whatever it was I just said—even if the challenge is exactly on target. It's a kind of ethical laziness, an automatic excuse-making or defensiveness, or what we sometimes call “rationalizing.” We could call it *offhand self-justification*.

I may not even get to the point of asking if the challenge actually is on target. Indeed, that's the idea. I'd rather not. Self-defense is all that counts. I try to paper over my uncertainties (or insecurities, or half-knowledge, or wishful thinking) by grabbing for some excuse—and any excuse will do. “It's OK to cheat the phone company, because . . . because, well, everyone else does it too . . . because the phone company cheats *you* . . . because . . .”

Asked for your reasons, you should give them. There is nothing wrong with trying to defend yourself. The problem lies with the offhand or automatic spirit (or, more accurately, spiritlessness) of the defense. Once again, it becomes an excuse for not really *thinking*.

- S: Of course the death penalty deters murders. It's a proven fact that murder rates are lower in states with the death penalty.
- A: I'm not so sure about that. My understanding is that murder rates are *higher* in states with the death penalty.
- S: Well, you can prove anything with numbers.

S initially appeals to “numbers”—comparative murder rates—to support her position. Challenged, though, she does not reconsider her position or explore other possibilities. She just dismisses any studies that disagree with what she believes—and in the process manages to dismiss the very “numbers” she herself just cited. But she doesn't even notice. You can tell that in the next discussion she'll be right back citing the same “proven fact” again.

RESISTING OFFHAND SELF-JUSTIFICATION

There are no surefire ways to avoid rationalizing. It takes a kind of self-confidence, honesty, and maturity that develop slowly, and even then we seldom escape the temptation entirely. Sometimes it's hard even to recognize an offhand self-justification when it is right in front of our eyes. Yet there are some useful strategies for overcoming the urge.

Remind yourself how self-defeating it is. Making excuses only allows us to go on with some questionable behavior until we get into even worse trouble. It may even be worse than merely hanging on to one unintelligent

opinion. When we rationalize, we saddle ourselves with more and more unintelligent opinions—new ones invented, off the top of the head, to patch up the holes in the old ones. But the new ones are likely to be full (or fuller) of holes too. It's not a winning game.

Watch yourself. Step a little more slowly the next time you find yourself casting about for some excuse to put questions to rest. Ask instead whether you really are justified in the first place.

Watch for that telltale anger or irritation at being challenged. We often find ourselves becoming irritated or angry when our especially precious excuses are too persistently or effectively challenged by someone else. But, of course, we get angry at the person challenging us, rather than considering that we might be at fault for offering an offhand excuse in the first place. Anger at someone else keeps us from having to be angry at ourselves. Better take the irritation as a warning sign.

Avoid the automatic counterattack. Again, watch yourself. Listening to someone else, are you trying to understand, or just waiting for them to stop so that you can give your comeback? Are you trying to win, or to learn? Watch your voice tone: are you conveying ridicule, irritation? Take a time-out if you need it. Give yourself some space to think.

"WE ARE ALL SELFISH"

Here is an especially tempting kind of offhand self-justification that needs a special look of its own. It is the assertion that "everyone is selfish"—sometimes even taken to the point of arguing that there is no other way anyone could possibly be, a view usually called "psychological egoism." It's certainly a quick and easy short-circuit out of ethics. If everyone is really selfish anyway, you have no reason not to be selfish yourself, right? Indeed, you can't help it!

We Are Social Animals

Actually, though, very few people past infancy are *that* wrapped up in themselves. We're social animals—and in almost any life with others there's also awareness and responsiveness to others. An athlete sets a new record and all of us, watching, are thrilled too. A kid gets lost in the airport and right away a dozen strangers are ready to help. Think of parents' love for children. Teachers, scientists, soldiers, artists—our lives become compelling and meaningful only when we give them over to something greater than ourselves.

Not that the self doesn't count at all. We do not have to go so far as self-sacrifice—although very often people do: think again of parents, or

teachers, or soldiers. For basic ethics it's enough that others' needs register as well as our own. Of course, most people are *somewhat* self-concerned—it's just that the self is nowhere near the whole story.

"Sure," says the egoist, "but if I give myself to science or art, or feel compelled to help the lost kid in the airport, it's because I *want* to. And doing what I want is certainly following my self-interest."

But it all depends on how you want it. If you want to discover a cure for cancer just because it would make you famous, then it's just a selfish want. Most people, though, would actually want to discover a cure for cancer at least in part because it would alleviate a lot of suffering. And that's enough to get us well beyond egoism. Same for the kid in the airport. You want to help the kid because the kid needs help. It's only a kind of extremism to try to reduce everything to some variety of self-interest. We are actually much more interesting creatures than that.

Egoism as a Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

Egoism can sometimes drive others *into* a cynical kind of selfishness. If everyone around you is acting selfishly, you may feel driven to do the same out of discouragement, hurt, or sheer self-protection. If all of your soccer teammates hog the ball, so will you, probably. If all of your business competitors are solely driven by the bottom line (you think), you will be tempted too.

Here, as in offhand self-justification, egoism is made an *excuse*—in this case, for convenient kinds of selfishness. It allows people to justify their own egoism to themselves as well as to others. It is an invitation to mutual mistrust and cynicism. Selfishness becomes a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy, but not because it is somehow "natural." Rather, normal ethical relations have failed.

The point is that this is not how things usually go. In soccer, for example, no team of ball-hogs is going very far. Some basic lessons about teamwork have been forgotten. In business as well, most of the time, businesses answer to other values too: some community responsibility, some care for employees and customers. (It's just that we tend to hear about the flagrant violations.)

Anthropologists do offer (a few) examples of whole societies of seemingly totally selfish people. If you look at those societies closely, though, you will see that they are on the brink of extinction, living in desperate straits. The lesson here too is *not* that "Deep down everyone is really selfish," but exactly the opposite: that it takes almost total social collapse to bring us to actual, full-scale egoism. And oftentimes not even that is enough.

The Truth in Egoism

Any view as persistent as egoism must have something going for it. So we also need to ask: what's the *truth* in egoism? I think there are several.

There are times in your life when you are naturally and appropriately more self-oriented than at other times. Young people going to college, for one example, may find themselves with fairly few attachments and somewhat unsure of their direction. At such times, a turn inward—a preoccupation for a while with yourself—is natural and probably healthy. It's dramatically limited (I've been suggesting) as a full-time way of life, but it can be sensible in the short run.

Besides, selves are often fragile. Sometimes (it's true) we are *too* tuned to the needs and expectations of others. Sometimes we need to give ourselves the support and attention we need to recover a sense of who we are and what we want. This is probably much more common than the opposite—the self that claims too much and needs to be put in its place. Here too a little bit of self-preoccupation is again a good idea.

More common than any kind of egoism, I think, are other reasons we fail to take account of the needs and expectations of others. The real concern of moralists should be *inattention*. Habit, for one thing, and the inability to listen. Or maybe the unwillingness to listen, as in offhand self-justification. Or the unwillingness to acknowledge sheer *difference*—this would be “self-centeredness” not in the sense of pursuing only one's own interests but in the sense of taking one's self to be the only kind of self there can be. You can't even begin to cross the gap between self and the other if you don't think there is a gap in the first place.

So, of course, ethics sometimes has an uphill fight. There are parts of ourselves that resist. It just may not be so useful to think of those parts as “selfish.” To say it again: we're more complex and interesting than that!

DOGMATISM

We all know people who are so committed to their ethical beliefs that they cannot see any other side and cannot defend their own beliefs beyond simply asserting and reasserting them. Animal rights, the death penalty, drugs . . . whatever it is, they already have the answer. The Answer, I mean. They may appear to listen (or not), but they *will not* change their minds. Name “their” issue (or perhaps *any* issue), and they know the answer already.

To be clear: being committed to a certain set of values—living up to them, or trying to, and sticking up for them when we can—is a fine thing.

And there are certain basic moral values to which we are and *should be* deeply and unshakably committed. Dogmatism is a problem because some people go much further. They make no distinction between the basic “givens” of our moral life and everyday moral opinions that are not at all so clear-cut. Every one of their value judgments, to them, has the same status as the Ten Commandments.

Dogmatists tend to disagree about the actual issues—which in fact is a bit ironic. Dogmatists do agree, though, that careful and open-ended thinking about ethical issues is not necessary. After all, if you already know the answer, there is no need to think about it. If you need to argue for your position, you admit that it needs defending, which is to say that people can legitimately have doubts. But that can’t be true: you already know that your position is the only right one. Therefore, any reasoned argument for your position is unnecessary. And any reasoned argument *against* your position is obviously absurd. So, why listen?

Dogmatism, then, is a form of ethical short-circuit too. No more thinking is going on here than when we offhandedly justify ourselves with whatever reasons come along. Dogmatists may have their reasons better organized, and may happily debate them with you all afternoon, but they are not really *thinking* about those reasons, only repeating them—louder and louder, probably.

AVOIDING DOGMATISM

Ethics, once again, paints a different picture. Despite the stereotypes, the point of ethics is generally not to moralize or to dictate what is to be done. The real point of ethics is to offer some tools, and some possible directions, for thinking about difficult matters, recognizing from the start—as the very rationale for ethics, in fact—that the world is seldom so simple or clear-cut. Struggle and uncertainty *are* part of ethics, as they are part of life.

So we need to think carefully if we are to act ethically. Remember, thinking carefully about ethical issues—avoiding dogmatism—is *itself* a moral act. Thinking carefully *is* (part of) acting ethically. Philosopher Joshua Halberstam puts it well:

We need an “ethics of belief” that places value on the way we arrive at our opinions. A healthy ethics of belief requires that our judgments be based on sound evidence. Opinionated people have a weak ethics of belief. They make no distinction between a legitimate opinion and an arbitrary opinion; all that matters is that they have an opinion. The problem with opinionated people is that they don’t take their own views seriously enough! When we do take our opinions seriously, humility follows.

Here are some strategies for avoiding dogmatism.

Whenever you find yourself insisting too strongly on some view of your own, try to stop yourself and really listen to the “other side.” Imagine that you’re an anthropologist or psychologist studying other people’s views. Just consider what they’re saying without immediately thinking of your responses to it. What sort of world do these people live in? How does it hang together? How can it seem like the simple and obvious truth to them, just as yours does to you? Later on you can kick in your own views and compare them. First just give yourself a little space to listen.

Another useful strategy is to seek out *arguments* for the other side(s). One way that dogmatic views ensure themselves long lives is by systematically avoiding the other side’s arguments. Only the other side’s *conclusions* are registered. This person is for (or against) the death penalty, let’s say, and that’s all a dogmatist needs to know. He doesn’t ask *why*: he’s not interested. Looking at the *reasons* for other and opposed positions both helps you understand the positions better and may begin to introduce some more complex thinking. It’s amazing but true: people don’t just disagree with us out of sheer perversity or ignorance! Again this is an “obvious” thing that sometimes we don’t really quite know well enough.

It pays to adjust our language as well. Instead of categorical statements of dogmatic opinions, especially bumpersticker-style slogans (“Meat Is Murder,” “It’s Adam and Eve, Not Adam and Steve,” etc.), try to speak in a way that is less categorical and final. Very few reasonable ethical positions can be shoehorned into a bumpersticker or slogan, clever as they might be—in fact, you might avoid any view that *could* be shoehorned into a bumpersticker for just that reason—and besides, this way of putting things polarizes views and makes the other side seem stupid and misled. Don’t call names either (“You animal-rights fanatics . . .”; “You Bible-thumpers . . .”). Avoid the easy labels (“liberal,” “right-wing,” etc.).

Sometimes language leads the mind. Speaking in an open-ended way may help you begin to *think* in an open-ended way as well. Certainly it will create quite different conversations. Typically one dogmatic statement just provokes an equal and opposite dogmatic statement. Speak differently and not only your mind but your discussions may open up differently, and more constructively too! (This book will have a lot more to say about language in chapter 11.)

Halberstam again:

Don’t elevate your every whim into a conviction. Having an opinion is one thing, delivering the Ten Commandments is something else. Intellectual honesty demands that unless you’re a bona fide expert in the field, a hint of tentativeness should accompany all your views and decisions. Indeed, a hint of uncertainty is appropriate even if you *are* an authority. Here’s a simple device to ensure that you have the proper humility when offering your opinion: When you speak, imagine that an expert is sitting right across from you. Now offer that opinion.

ETHICS AND DIVERSITY

“It’s all relative,” we sometimes say. What’s right for you may not be right for me. Mind your own business. Don’t criticize. Any moral opinion is as good as the next. This attitude is a form of *relativism*.

Relativism begins with the simple observation that different individuals and societies sometimes have different moral values. Some countries laugh off drunk driving, at least did until recently; others have put drunk drivers, on first (only) offense, before the firing squad. Or again, some societies tolerate homeless populations running into the millions, while in others the very idea of allowing even one person to be homeless, whatever the cause, would be shameful, unthinkable. Some societies condemn sex between unmarried young people; others approve and even encourage it.

Relativists go on to wonder if any single standard can be “right.” And we should acknowledge right away that this can be a good question. At the very least, it’s mind-opening to look at other points of view, and ethical matters are complex enough that no one point of view is likely to have a monopoly on the truth anyway. Besides, sometimes we need to assert our right to do as we please, even if others think we are making a big mistake. This is one of relativism’s chief uses in practice: making a space for us to figure things out for ourselves.

OFFHAND SELF-JUSTIFICATION AGAIN

But relativists typically go much further—and here relativism becomes a short-circuit. From our differences about ethical questions they may conclude that there is no legitimate basis for arguing about them at all. It’s all just opinion, they say, and one opinion is as good as another. But here, though relativism may appear to be the very model of open-mindedness, it actually has just the opposite effect. “Minding our own business” begins to close our minds instead.

U: I support the death penalty. I believe that it saves lives because it makes murderers think twice before killing someone. As the Bible says, “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.”

V: I don’t agree.

U: Why?

V: I just don’t. That’s my opinion, and it’s as good as yours!

Maybe that’s a little blatant, but you get the idea. Here relativism slides right into offhand self-justification. V treats it like a magic key to escape any kind of thinking whatsoever. She cannot even be bothered to offer any reasons, let alone engage U’s.

In fact, all opinions on this and most ethical subjects require further thinking. Are U's arguments good ones? What values stand on the other side? What are V's reasons *against* the death penalty? Is the death penalty really a deterrent? Doesn't the Bible also tell us not to kill?

WHEN "OUR BUSINESS" IS EVERYONE'S BUSINESS

The chief problem with relativism, even more basic, is this: however diverse values may be, and however hard it may be to arrive at some reasonable collective decision about certain matters like these, we have to do so in order to have a liveable life together. Even to decide to tolerate a very diverse set of practices on certain issues has major consequences for many people and therefore is itself a morally consequential decision.

The key point here may be a bit surprising to people who have grown used to using "relativism" as another form, in effect, of offhand self-justification (and to their teachers too, maybe). To say it again: even *if* moral values vary all over the map, there is no way out of some good hard thinking. We still have to work out the most sensible way forward together.

Take pollution. If the air is polluted, it doesn't merely affect the polluters. If we spend money on pollution cleanup and prevention, on the other hand, we can't spend that money on other things, perhaps better things, maybe again for all of us. For some people it could be a life-or-death matter, however we decide. The same goes for issues like fair trade, professional ethics, other animals, and many others. None of these are just our "own" business. Other people's lives and health and possibilities are at stake too. These matters—basic ethical issues—are *everyone's* business.

The relativist's stock phrase, "Mind your own business," is therefore an antisocial response. It not only avoids thinking on the relativist's part, it also refuses to acknowledge that on issues like these, however much we differ, we still need to work out some way of going on together.

D: I oppose legal abortion.

E: Why don't you just mind your own business? Like the slogan says, if you're against abortion, then don't have one!

But there is more to it than this. If some of us practice abortion and some do not, the result is a society in which abortion is practiced. The rest of us have to stand for it, at least insofar as we have to stand aside. Likewise, if some of us pollute and some don't, the result is pollution for everyone. In such matters, we cannot act as though everyone can simply do as they please without anyone else being affected.

Some philosophers argue that this is the very *point* of ethics: to help us arrive at certain standards that we all are to live by when all of us are affected by each other's behavior. Some philosophers even start from this point to build

a theory of ethics. On this view, ethics is precisely for those cases where “Mind your own business!” doesn’t work as an approach to a problem. Instead, we need to work things out together. Keep an open mind; stay in touch and keep talking.

Relativism actually isn’t a bad beginning: it does remind us that there are others, probably with different views, with whom we have to work things out. But then we need to go and do it!

RELATIVISM: PHILOSOPHICAL QUESTIONS

This chapter concentrates on practical objections to ethical relativism. Even if most of relativism’s claims are true, I argue, we can and must actually *think*, long and hard, about ethical issues. The tools in your ethical toolbox are no less vital.

Relativism is also much argued over among philosophers. In this box I want to explore some of these further objections and arguments over relativism—briefly—to give you a sense both of how philosophers argue and of how complex some seemingly obvious things really are. Here are a number of loosely linked questions and challenges to think about.

Is the Diversity of Values Overrated?

Ethical relativism is based upon the claim that moral values differ in fundamental ways among different people and cultures. This is called *descriptive* ethical relativism: it is an empirical claim about the world.

Empirical claims need testing. So what’s the evidence? How much *real* disagreement is there about moral values? That is, do we really disagree “all the way down,” so to speak, or might apparently different moral values flow instead from different factual beliefs about the world?

Inuit bands were reported by early European explorers to sometimes abandon their infirm people in the cold of winter to die. This was contrasted to the European attitude, which was supposed to be one of respect and care for the infirm (though in fact it was much spottier than that). The explorers, anyway, were scandalized. It looked like a clear difference of values.

Later on the story got more complicated. For one thing, it was pointed out that traditional Inuit bands lived at the margins between survival and starvation in the winters and sometimes had to move quickly in the spring to find food. Infirm people would not be able to keep up. Leaving them behind might be seen as a matter of social survival. Even so, moreover, it turned out that abandonments have been very rare among the Inuit and occurred (when they are reliably documented to have happened at all) only under extreme duress. The reports themselves were mostly wrong.

Others pointed out that the Inuit apparently believed in an afterlife—and believed that people enter the afterlife in the same condition they leave this one. So allowing aging people to die as their capacities waned would not necessarily evince heartlessness or disrespect for life—quite the opposite. Again, if Europeans (really, truly) had shared this belief, they presumably would have done the same.

In this case, then, what looked like a textbook (!) illustration of relativism turned out to be partly a disagreement about certain facts (e.g., certain beliefs about the afterlife) coupled with some culturally self-congratulatory exaggeration on the Europeans' parts. So how real are other supposedly fundamental disagreements about moral values? Do we really differ that much? Can you think of contemporary ethical disagreements that might dissolve under scrutiny, like the Inuit case might? Can you think of some that wouldn't?

Why Should Diversity Be the Last Word?

No doubt there are at least *some* serious disagreements about moral values themselves. But what exactly does this prove? Is disagreement the last word?

After all, we could take our disagreements as *starting points*—something to think about and learn from—rather than end points. The fact that some people are racists, for example, doesn't prove that racism is only wrong *for us*. It only proves that people have some learning to do. Now people are disagreeing about global warming. Perhaps the same thing can be said: if and when we really look at the evidence, will we really conclude that we have no obligation to take global warming seriously?

So perhaps the real question is, how much disagreement about moral values would remain after all of this thinking and learning? Is it so obvious that we would still disagree in such fundamental ways, about values themselves? Again, a little humility and investigation—and indeed, some real ethical argument—would be a much better idea.

What Does the Diversity of Values Imply?

Now suppose that descriptive ethical relativism *is* true. That is, suppose we really do differ, and differ sharply, about moral values, and would continue to differ even after careful criticism and argument. What then? What follows, if anything, about moral values or ethical arguments?

Does it follow, in particular, that there can be no single “right” answer to ethical questions? (This would be the kind of view that philosophers call *prescriptive* moral relativism.) Not necessarily. Sheer difference, by itself, does not prove that no one single standard is “right.” Maybe all sides but one are *wrong*. People disagree about all kinds of issues (Is the Earth flat? Does

vitamin C prevent colds?), but we don't suppose there is no truth of the matter in those cases. Is there something special about value judgments that makes them different from "facts" in this way? Maybe, but if you think so, see if you can explain what it is. Spell out the argument.

One note of caution. It may actually be true that there is no one single "right" answer to (many) ethical questions—but not for relativistic reasons. Maybe there is no one single "right" answer because most ethical situations are so *complex* that a variety of different but equally good responses are possible. This would not mean that any answer is as good as the next (there are still plenty of *wrong* answers) or that critical thinking is somehow pointless in ethics. Quite the opposite: once again, it would call for more flexible and subtle thinking still.

Does the Diversity of Values Make a Practical Difference?

Now suppose that prescriptive ethical relativism *is* true. That is, suppose there is no arguably "right" answer to ethical questions, and maybe even that any answer is in some sense as good as the next. What exactly would this imply?

Suppose the relativist is right that you and I cannot argue with, say, cannibals about cannibalism. Well, how often do you argue with cannibals? Mostly we argue with people who share our terms. I have never argued with a cannibal, not even once, but I argued constantly with my own children, whose eating habits also left something to be desired. And I *could* argue with them—they were growing into *our* culture and had some learning to do.

On the other hand, sometimes we *are* asked to make ethical judgments across cultural lines, as when American corporations were pressured to (and mostly did) pull out of South Africa to protest apartheid. Was that a valid action, in your view? What would the relativist say about it? What do you think of the relativist's response?

The Truth in Relativism

Finally, for those who reject relativism, what do you think relativism is nonetheless *right* about?

The complexity of many situations, making it hard to say that there is one single right answer? That's a useful reminder: it encourages some moral humility.

The need for some ethical space, even to make our own mistakes? A good point also: ethical demands can sometimes be very confining, especially when dogmatic moralists get going on them. Relativism is a way of at least winning a little space to think for yourself. Just don't think that you therefore have to defend "relativism" in the sense we have been

exploring. Again, it may not be relativism at all, really: more like the *complexity* of real ethical issues. “Relativism” here just stands for a freer spirit, more flexibility in ethics, a reminder that the truth is not so easy to come by.

Relativism also can amount to an insistence that we need to look at things from others’ points of view. Our own view is *not* the only view around; we have much to learn from others, as they may from us, and in any case we have to work out some way of going on together. Again, relativism tempers dogmatism . . . but still, we’d be better off without either.

WHO NEEDS ETHICS?

There is one more form of ethical short-circuit that we need to consider. Moral *disengagers* claim that ethical questioning and thinking is unhelpful and unnecessary. To them, ethics seems so vague and contentious that we ought to replace it with more specific and definite rules or ways of decision-making. We *should* cut ethics out of the “circuit” of practical thinking, they say. Who would rather agonize and argue over some hard moral decision when you could just apply some simple and fairly automatic rule or procedure, like balancing your checkbook, and be done with it?

“JUST FOLLOW THE LAW”

Isn’t it enough, for example, to just respect the law? This is an argument sometimes heard in the business world: that the law is definite; it sets rules that do good moral work, like requiring a certain degree of self-limitation and at least minimal social responsibility; and when the law is unclear, there are the courts to figure it out. That’s enough.

But in truth it is *not* enough. While following the law may help out morality as far as it goes—some laws protect us and other people from harm, or back up certain kinds of promises, like formal contracts and marriage vows—in general the law stops well short of what ethics requires. The law prohibits certain harms, for example, but there it stops. It rarely requires us to actually do good. Scrooge broke no laws, but he is hardly an ethical model. Then too, we can lie and cheat to our hearts’ content, but it’s all legal as long as it doesn’t break any contracts. Ads, for example, can be extremely misleading without actually lying. Ethics often asks more of us than that.

Moreover, ethics often shapes the law. Ethics guides us as we consider what the law *should* be about motorcycle helmets or genetically-modified organisms or the social obligations of business executives. If the law were enough by itself, how would legislators decide what laws to make? This is also why it is not quite honest for powerful people or corporations to argue

that simply following the law is enough, because behind the scenes they often use their power to shape the laws in the first place.

Another basic problem has probably already occurred to you: the law can sometimes be morally wrong. United States law once enforced racial segregation. It still allows the release of long-lived toxins into the environment. Laws in many countries prohibit people from gathering or communicating freely. At least the question must sometimes be asked: Are these laws really good, right, fair? Maybe, maybe not . . . but obviously the law itself can't tell us. Again, we need ethics!

"VALUE-FREE" DECISION-MAKING

Another kind of moral disengager appeals to various methods for what is supposed to be "value-free" decision-making. For example, economists may argue that we can use quantitative methods to decide policy-level questions like whether to legalize marijuana or require motorcyclists to wear helmets. Let us just total up all the benefits and costs of various possible regulations or policies, they say, and choose the one that maximizes benefits over costs. What could be more obvious than that?

Ethics' counter-argument is not that cost-benefit economic decision-making is a mistake. Often it can be revealing and helpful. Ethics instead just points out that this kind of decision-making is itself an *ethics*. In fact, as such, it even has an official name—utilitarianism—and chapter 6 explores it in detail. But utilitarianism is not the only possible ethic. There are other ethical values too. What about justice, for example? What about the seventh generation?

The usual "benefits" and "costs" are also typically restricted to humans alone, and in economics there is a strong tendency to reduce values pretty much to those desires we (are said to) express by what we buy. On some ethical views, though, this kind of reduction is actually an ethical *problem*. Part of ethics' job is to speak for values that don't so readily turn into things we can buy. Again, arguably, there is much more to the story.

Well, then, if not economics, at least *science* seems to offer much clearer methods for reaching conclusions than ethics—objective and quantifiable methods that all sides accept from the start. So again, why engage in endless and fruitless debates when we can just run tests?

Tests for what, though? Maybe cures for cancer, or ways to mitigate climate change. Fine—but these are already ethical goals. Once again, ethics comes first. Scientists choose what issues and questions to address and what methods to use (or not). And these choices depend on values. In this sense, once again, like economics, science is not "value-free" at all. It is because we *value* human health and life, for example, that we research life-saving and -prolonging therapies. It is also why we don't experiment in many intrusive ways upon each other, even though we might find out a lot more—and why we are now debating about experiments upon other animals for the same purposes.

Neither economics nor science, then, somehow renders ethics dispensable. Actually, a decision-making method that was truly “value-free” would be monstrous. Instead—lucky for us—all decision-making methods are value-*laden* (as it’s often put). Indeed, any time we choose to do one thing rather than another, or anything at all rather than nothing, we are acting on certain values and leaving others to the side. When the needs and legitimate expectations of others as well as ourselves are at stake, the values involved are ethical by definition. The only question is how explicit and deliberate we are going to be about them. Ethics says: the more the better.



FOR REVIEW

1. What is it to “short-circuit” ethical thinking? Give a specific example.
2. Why not “fly by instinct”?
3. Illustrate “offhand self-justification.”
4. What is a good way to resist offhand self-justification?
5. “Everyone is really just out for themselves.” Why is this not so, according to the text?
6. Illustrate dogmatism, using yourself as an example if you can.
7. What are some concrete strategies for avoiding dogmatism?
8. When does relativism “slide into offhand self-justification”?
9. Why does the text accuse relativism of being antisocial?
10. Review some of the philosophical difficulties with relativism.
11. According to the text, why isn’t it enough to resolve moral questions by “just following the law”?
12. According to the text, why is “value-free” decision-making no way to disengage from ethics?



FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

2.1 SELF-REFLECTIONS

We have noted some of the ways in which people short-circuit ethical thinking—often without even noticing or admitting that that is what is happening. So now consider yourself. What do you get dogmatic about? What do

you rationalize about? What do you get defensive about? What do you have trouble hearing? Why? (Explore that *why* question—understanding yourself better is often the key to change.)

Give yourself some credit too. What are you *good* at hearing? On what topics are you truly open-minded? Where do you *embrace* ethical thinking? And why is this?

Admitting to a degree of short-circuiting does not mean that you instantly have to change. Perhaps you will never be able to change completely. The point is instead to mark out the areas that need special attention—places where you need to watch yourself, and where others need to be both more sensitive and maybe more insistent.

2.2 HEARING THE “OTHER SIDE”

Name some ethical positions that you find especially hard to take seriously. Do this before reading on.

Now, as an exercise in opening the mind a little, your task is to write or state these positions in as neutral a way as possible. You don’t have to be effusive, and don’t try to be extremely positive—usually it is easier to be overly positive than to state a view carefully. Just try to state each position in a reasonable way, not loaded or satirical but simply straight. You may have to do a little research to get them right. In class, ask a classmate who holds those moral views to help you out.

Consider also the *reasons* that are typically used to support these views. What are those reasons? What are the best reasons according to *you*—the reasons that would persuade you if any reasons could? Again, don’t argue with the positions. Just look for the strongest defense of each position you can find.

You don’t have to agree with these positions, of course—after all, you picked them because you not only disagree with them but also find them hard to take seriously. The point is to try to understand them, and in general to try to get a little distance from your own reactions, to create a little more space for open-mindedness—a longer rather than a shorter “circuit.”

This exercise works best if you avoid the hottest issues that we have all heard debated too many times already, such as abortion. People seem to have heard the two main positions on abortion enough that it is too easy to rattle them off. On other issues, it takes more care and work—and that is really the point.

2.3 DIALOGUES

The kinds of ethical short-circuits discussed in this chapter are partly conversational or argumentative moves: that is, they occur in the back-and-forth of conversation or argument. Often enough they are well-hidden, too—part of the aim, after all, is to disguise them from other people and often even from ourselves.

Read the following exchanges (more than once) and consider where—and why—you think that ethical thinking is being short-circuited. You might want to illustrate and back up your answers by rewriting part or all of the exchange to work out and illustrate ways to keep the discussion more honest and productive. (And notice, as you rework them, that there may be quite a lot of potentially fertile ideas in the exchanges if you give them a less reactive and judgmental kind of attention.) Your aim is to resolve the issues: for now, it is quite enough to identify and try to avoid the short-circuits. Oh, and fair warning: sometimes they are subtle!

■ “EATING MEAT IS NATURAL”

F: Eating meat is natural! People have always done it. I like the bumper-sticker that goes: I LOVE ANIMALS—THEY TASTE GOOD!

H: Bumpersticker ethics, why didn't I think of that?

F: Come on, how can you argue with nature?

G: Yeah, I suppose people have always lined up at McDonald's for their Heart Attack Special—I mean, quarter-pounder with shake and fries.

J: If I were a cannibal, I'd probably think it is perfectly natural to eat *you*.

F: Oh, please! We're humans, they're animals.

J: Last I checked we were animals too.

F: You know what I mean.

J: Really? Do *you* know what you mean?

K: What about if they don't see it coming? Besides, who's to say that cabbages or pineapples want to end up on your plate either? If you start worrying about that, you're going to starve to death.

G: You can argue all you want about cabbages or whatever, but what about cats and dogs? Would you eat them? People do, in some parts of the world.

K: That's sick.

H: You guys need to lighten up. Nobody's telling you what you have to eat. So for God's sake just live and let live—enjoy your food and quit arguing!

■ AFFIRMATIVE ACTION?

H: I just got rejected from my third college. At this rate, I'll have to go to the community college downtown and live in my parents' basement.

S: That really sucks; you're so well qualified too!

H: Right?! I mean, my SAT scores weren't awesome but I'm in like five clubs and I play soccer.

S: Yeah, white people these days have to do a lot more to have the same opportunities as black people. My friend who was a valedictorian didn't even get into his first choice! But I just heard Terrell talking about how he got into the same school. I'm not trying to be racist but I bet that with affirmative action and all, a black person with your SAT scores would definitely get into their top-choice college.

H: I know, dude! I didn't want to say it because then I'd sound like a racist but like . . . it makes sense if you think about it logically. I read a study online that said black people with certain SAT scores were guaranteed to get into the college of their choice. I'd kill to have that kind of privilege!

S: Yeah, I know what you mean! It makes me feel marginalized and definitely feels like reverse racism when you don't have the same opportunities as black people. I mean, they're not even oppressed anymore. Affirmative action hasn't been necessary since the '60s.

H: So true. If racism means being excluded from an institution because of the color of your skin, and I'm being excluded from not one, not two, but *three* institutions because of my skin color, then isn't that by definition racism? It doesn't take a genius; just someone who can follow a logical train of thought. Even black people would agree to that, since they're the ones so worried about getting rid of racism. They should care about reverse racism too!

S: Right, if that's the definition of racism, then aren't we all being oppressed by our race in different ways? Aren't we all victims of racism? And, since we're all oppressed, race shouldn't be a factor in college admissions.

H: Race only matters in society today because we make it matter. If we stopped playing the race card all the time, we wouldn't have these problems.

■ ACTIVE BYSTANDER

Jordan, Skyler, Casey, and Hayden went out to a few parties. At one of the parties, they saw a person who had clearly had too much to drink—he was stumbling, slurring his speech, and kept falling asleep. He ended up lying on the sidewalk, semi-conscious, outside the frat house. Jordan, Skyler, Casey, and Hayden didn't know him, and the group of friends walked past him on their way home. Now, it's the next morning, and the four friends are at brunch.

Jordan: Did ya'll see that person lying outside of the party last night? It looked like they were really messed up. I saw an empty handle on the ground next to them.

Skyler: Oh yeah, I did see that—I was pretty drunk though, so I didn't really process what I was seeing. Why do you mention it?

Jordan: Well everyone was walking past them and no one seemed to do anything about it. I didn't think much of it at the time but now I'm wondering if we should have done something.

Hayden: I'm sure they were fine. No one goes to frat parties alone, so their friends were probably around. And I'm sure they had their phone, so nothing *that* bad could have happened.

Casey: Yeah I saw that person in the party doing a keg stand and drinking from that handle! Obviously you shouldn't take shots after you do a 22-second keg stand. They should have known better.

Jordan: Well yeah, they shouldn't have drank that much but when we saw them they were totally incapacitated.

Skyler: But like . . . we didn't even know them! How is it our job to take care of every stranger who gets way too wasted? We'd never stop taking care of people if we helped every college kid who did that!

Hayden: Right, that's what I'm saying! We didn't even know them, it's not our job. A bunch of other people walked by on their way out too and they didn't do anything.

Casey: Even if they were "incapacitated" or whatever, it's still their own fault that they're in the situation. Remember last week, when I played flip cup for like an hour straight and could barely stand up afterward? I still got home fine.

Jordan: Exactly . . . you got home because I carried you! I didn't see anyone who was going to carry them home.

Casey: It's not our fault that that person has asshole friends. Plus there are people whose literal job it is to make sure drunk people get home safe, like campus police and the RAs.

Skyler: I agree! And what were we supposed to do—take them back to our dorm? They were way too drunk to tell us where they lived!

Hayden: Yeah, they would have woken up in a stranger's bedroom! That would scare the hell out of me.

Jordan: So . . . you don't think we did the wrong thing?

NOTES

Joshua Halberstam's book *Everyday Ethics* (Penguin, 1993) is an interesting and opinionated complement to this one. He is cited here from pp. 155 and 156.

Rationalizing may be one of the deepest of all pitfalls in ethics (and probably in life generally). For some psychological background, including some fascinating and unsettling experiments, see David Myers, *Social Psychology* (McGraw-Hill, multiple editions), chapters 2–4.

For an exemplary traditional discussion of relativism, see James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (McGraw-Hill, multiple editions), chapter 2. I deal with relativism from a different angle in my own book *Toward Better Problems* (Temple University Press, 1992), chapter 7. For further discussions

of pluralism and relativism in ethics, ethical egoism, and related questions, go to the “Ethics Updates” website at <http://ethics.sandiego.edu> and look under “Ethical Theory.”

Ethical thinkers who have tried to derive a substantive ethics precisely from the need to go on together in the face of diverse values include John Rawls, in *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University Press, 1971), sections 3 and 20–26—more in Rawls in **Going Farther** #7—and David Gauthier, in *Morals by Agreement* (Clarendon Press, 1986).

The “Affirmative Action?” dialogue in Exercise 2.3 was written by Claire Lockard and Helen Meskhidze, Elon class of 2016. “Active Bystander” was written by Claire Lockard and Felicia Cenca, members of the same class.



GOING FARTHER #3

ETHICS IN EXTRAORDINARY TIMES?

READING 5

“By the Way, Your Home Is on Fire”

REBECCA SOLNIT

REBECCA SOLNIT (b. 1961) is a researcher who has written on a variety of subjects including environment, politics, place, and art, and is a contributing editor at *Harper’s Magazine*. One of her most remarkable books is *A Paradise Built in Hell* (2009), a narrative which hails the extraordinary capacity of people and communities to self-organize in response to disasters—with the main agents of disorder, she argues, being the “authorities” whose interventions create the very disorder they fear and profess to be saving us from.

In this essay Solnit “goes farther” both with chapter 1’s theme of ethics and the longer-term future and chapter 2’s focus on various kinds of ethical short-circuits and ways of avoiding ethics entirely—which surely include various forms of denial, for example of climate change—and acting as if our ordinary responses to practical challenges in the past should be adequate to unprecedented new ones. What if we truly live in extraordinary times? Could Solnit be right that “sometimes the right thing to do in ordinary times is exactly the wrong thing to do in extraordinary times”? And if so, what is the right thing to do, now?

As the San Francisco bureaucrats on the dais murmured about why they weren’t getting anywhere near what we in the audience

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passionately hoped for, asked for, and worked for, my mind began to wander. I began to think of another sunny day on the other side of the country 13 years earlier, when nothing happened the way anyone expected. I had met a survivor of that day who told me his story.

A high-powered financial executive, he had just arrived on the 66th floor of his office building and entered his office carrying his coffee, when he saw what looked like confetti falling everywhere—not a typical 66th floor spectacle. . . . It was, of course, the morning of September 11th, and his friend had seen a plane crash into the north tower of the World Trade Center. My interviewee and his colleagues in the south tower got on the elevator. In another 15 minutes or so, that was going to be a fast way to die, but they managed to ride down to the 44th floor lobby safely. A guy with a bullhorn was there, telling people to go back to their offices.

Still holding his cup of coffee, he decided—as did many others in that lobby—to go down the stairs instead. When he reached the 20th floor, a voice came on the public address system and told people to go back to their offices. My storyteller thought about obeying those instructions. Still holding his coffee, he decided to keep heading down. He even considered getting back on an elevator, but hit the stairs again instead. Which was a good thing, because when he was on the ninth floor, the second plane crashed into the south tower, filling the elevator shafts with flaming jet fuel. Two hundred to 400 elevator riders died horribly. He put down his coffee at last and lived to tell the tale.

The moral of this story: people in power and bureaucrats seem exceptionally obtuse when it comes to recognizing that the world has changed and the old rules no longer apply. The advisors in the towers were giving excellent instructions for a previous crisis that happened to be profoundly different from the one at hand. That many had the good sense to disobey and evacuated early meant the stairwells were less crowded when the second round of evacuations began. Amazingly, the vast majority of people below the levels of the impacts made it out of both buildings—largely despite the advice of the building's management, not because of it.

GOING NOWHERE FAST

Sometimes the right thing to do in ordinary times is exactly the wrong thing to do in extraordinary times. That's easy to understand when something dramatic has happened. It's less easy to

grasp when the change is incremental and even understanding it requires paying attention to a great deal of scientific data.

Right now, you can think of the way we're living as an office tower and the fossil fuel economy as a plane crashing into it in very, very, very slow motion. Flaming jet fuel is a pretty good analogy, in its own way, for what the burning of fossil fuel is doing, although the death and destruction are mostly happening in slow motion, too—except when people are drowning in Hurricane Sandy-style superstorms or burning in Australian firestorms or dying in European heat waves. The problem is: How do you convince someone who is stubbornly avoiding looking at the flames that the house is on fire? (Never mind those who deny the very existence of fire.) How do you convince someone that what constitutes prudent behavior in ordinary times is now dangerous and that what might be considered reckless in other circumstances is now prudent?

That gathering in which I was daydreaming was a board meeting of the San Francisco Employees Retirement System. Ten months before, on April 23, 2013, in a thrilling and unanticipated unanimous vote, the city's Board of Supervisors opted to ask the retirement board to divest their fund of fossil fuel stocks, \$616,427,002 worth of them at last count—a sum that nonetheless represents only 3.3% of its holdings. That vote came thanks to a growing climate change divestment movement that has been attempting to address the problem of fossil fuel corporations and their environmental depredations in a new way.

Divestment serves a number of direct and indirect causes, including awakening public opinion to the dangers we face and changing the economic/energy landscape. As is now widely recognized, preventing climate change from reaching its most catastrophic potential requires keeping four-fifths of known carbon reserves (coal, oil, and gas) in the ground. The owners of those reserves—those giant energy corporations and states like Russia and Canada that might as well be—have no intention of letting that happen.

Given a choice between the bottom line and the fate of the Earth, the corporations have chosen to deny the scientific facts (at least publicly), avoid the conversation, or insist that retrenching is so onerous as to be impossible. At the same time, they have been up-armoring political action committees, funding climate change disinformation campaigns, paying off politicians, and, in many cases, simply manipulating governments to serve the corporations and their shareholders rather than humanity or even voters. It's been a largely one-sided war for a long time. Now, thanks to climate activists worldwide, it's starting to be more two-sided.

THE THINGS WE BURNED

An extraordinary new report tells us that 90 corporations and states are responsible for nearly two-thirds of all the carbon emissions that have changed our climate and our world since 1751. Chevron alone is responsible for 3.52% of that total, ExxonMobil for 3.22%, and BP for 2.24%. China since 1751 is responsible for 8.56%—less, that is, than those three petroleum giants. It's true that they produced that energy, rather than (for the most part) consuming it, but at this point we need to address the producers.

. . . [Moreover,] 63% of all human-generated carbon emissions have been produced in the past 25 years; that is, nearly two-thirds have been emitted *since* the first warnings were sounded about what was then called “global warming” and the need to stop or scale back. We on Earth now, we who have been adults for at least 25 years, are the ones who have done more than all earlier human beings combined to unbalance the atmosphere of the planet, and thus its weather systems, oceans, and so much more.

It's important to note, as so many have, that it's we in the global north and the rich countries for whom most of that fuel has been burned. And it's important to note as well (though fewer have) that, according to the opinion polls, a majority of individuals north and south, even in our own oil empire, are willing to change in response to this grim fact. It's the giant energy corporations and the governments in their thrall (when they're not outright oil regimes) that are stalling and refusing, as we saw when a meaningful climate compact was sabotaged in Copenhagen in late 2009.

. . . Next comes the hard part: getting universities, cities, states, pension funds, and other financial entities to actually divest. They often like to suggest that it's an impossible or crazy or wildly difficult and risky move, though fund managers shuffle their funds around all the time for other reasons.

Once upon a time, similar entities swore that it was inconceivable to end the institution of slavery, upend the profitable economics of southern plantations, and violate the laws of “property”; once upon another time, you couldn't possibly give women the vote and change the whole face of democracy and public life, or require seatbelts and other extravagant safety devices, or limit the industrial processes that produce acid rain, or phase out the chlorofluorocarbons so useful for refrigeration and destructive of the ozone layer. Except that this country did all of that, over the gradually declining protests that it was too radical and burdensome. When radical shifts become the status quo, most forget how and why it happened and come to see that status quo as inevitable and even

eternal, though many of its best aspects were the fruit of activism and change.

We tend to think that sticking with something is a calmer and steadier way to go than jettisoning it, even though that rule obviously doesn't apply to sinking ships. Sometimes, after the iceberg or the explosion, the lifeboat is safer than the luxury liner, though getting on it requires an urgent rearrangement of your body and your expectations. The value of fossil fuel corporations rests on their strategic reserves. Extracting and burning those reserves would devastate the climate, so keeping most of them in the ground is a key goal, maybe *the* key goal, in forestalling the worst versions of what is already unfolding.

The curious thing about fossil fuel divestment is that many highly qualified financial analysts and, as of last week, the British parliament's environmental audit committee suggest that such investments are volatile, unsafe, and could crash in the fairly near future. They focus on the much discussed carbon bubble and its potential for creating stranded assets. So there's a strong argument for divestment simply as a matter of fiscal (rather than planetary) prudence.

According to many scenarios, divesting energy company stocks will have no impact, or even a positive impact, on a portfolio. The biggest question, however, is what constitutes a good portfolio on a planet spiraling into chaos. The best way—maybe the only way—to manage a portfolio is to manage the planet, or at least to participate in trying. How will your stocks do as the oceans die? Or—leaving out all humanitarian concerns—as massive crop failures decimate markets and maybe populations? Is the fate of the Earth your responsibility or someone else's?

FOR THE PEOPLE WHO WILL BE 86 IN THE YEAR 2100

In that pretty room, a few dozen activists and one San Francisco supervisor, John Avalos, a great leader on climate issues, faced off against the San Francisco Employees Retirement System board and its staff who talked interminably about how wild and reckless it would be to divest. And it was then that it struck me: inaction and caution may seem so much more rational than action, unless you're in a burning building or on a sinking ship. And that's what made me think of the World Trade Center towers on the day they were hit by those hijacked airliners.

It was as though the people in that room were having different conversations in different languages in different worlds. And

versions of that schizophrenic conversation are being had all over this continent and in Europe. Students at the University of California, Berkeley, and across the California system of higher education are launching this conversation with the university regents and I already dread the same foot-dragging performances I've been watching here for almost a year.

There's already a long list of institutions that have committed to divestment, from the United Church of Christ and the San Francisco State University Foundation to the Sierra Club Foundation and 17 philanthropic foundations. Staff leadership at the Wallace Global Fund, one of the 17 divesting, said, "Who in our community could proudly defend, today, a decision not to have divested from South Africa 30 years ago? In hindsight, the moral case seems too clear. How then might we envision defending, 20 years from now, keeping our millions invested in business-as-usual fossil energy, at precisely the moment scientists are telling us there is no time left to lose?" . . .

Climate activists speak the language of people who know that we're in an emergency. The retirement board is speaking the language of people who don't. The board members don't deny the science of climate change, but as far as I can tell, they don't realize what that means for everyone's future, including that of members of their pension fund and their children and grandchildren. The words "fiduciary duty" kept coming up, which means the board's and staff's primary responsibility and commitment are to the wellbeing of the fund. It was implied that selling 3.3% of the portfolio for reasons of principle was a wild and irrational thing to support, no less do.

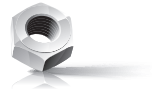
But it isn't just principle. The pensioners receiving money from the board will be living on Earth, not some other planet. Exactly what that means in 10, 20, or 50 years depends on what we do now. That we, by the way, includes money managers, investors, and pension-holders, as well as politicians and activists, and you who are reading this. What, after all, does "fiduciary duty" mean in an emergency? Can you make sound investments on a planet that's going haywire without addressing the causes of that crisis? In such circumstances, shouldn't fiduciary duty include addressing the broader consequences of your investments? . . .

Here's what I wrote the board before the meeting:

Not only prosperity but human health and food supplies depend on a stable climate, but it's getting less stable all the time. How much we will lose, how much we will salvage depends on whether we act now. I get it that the board's first responsibility is to the financial wellbeing of the

fund. Even more so it's to the pensioners, from those now receiving benefits to the youngest person paying in. But nothing exists in isolation: the stock market depends, whether or not Wall Street remembers, on weather, crops, strong markets for products, and the rest of what a stable world provides. And even a nice pension would not assuage the need of pensioners afflicted by tropical diseases moving northward, extreme heat that disproportionately affects the elderly, rising sea levels that take away billions of dollars of coastal California real estate—including San Francisco's runways and the city's landfill areas. Crop failure and rising food prices, water shortages, dying oceans, climate refugees.

. . . [D]ivestment can be done now with no loss, even possibly with an upside, say many financial analysts. In any case, it's the only honorable and sane thing to do—for the young who will be alive in 2064, for the beauty and complexity of the world we have been given, including all the other living things on it, for the sake of the people who are already suffering and will suffer more because of the disruption of the elegant system that is the Earth we inherited.



Ethics and Religion

We look next to those large regions where ethics and religion overlap. Despite how it may sometimes seem when we are in the midst of certain heated public debates, religious ethics readily fits into the picture that the last two chapters have been painting. All ethics, whether it be divinely inspired or empirically based, is in more or less the same boat when it comes to real-life practice: serious and constant thinking is required. And serious and constant thinking is in fact the *norm* at the very heart of religious ethics too.

AN APPROACH TO RELIGIOUS ETHICS

RELIGIOUS ETHICS AND COMMON HUMAN VALUES

Religions have long given us the words and the maxims that shape everyday ethics. “Love your neighbor as yourself” are the words of Jesus. “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” was Jesus’s version of a more traditional negative formulation also passed on by Confucius (“Don’t do to others what you don’t want them to do to you”) and Rabbi Hillel (“What is hateful to yourself, don’t do to another”). “Honor your father and mother” comes from the Ten Commandments, central in Torah and later in Christianity. The Buddha’s Noble Path includes “Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood.”

Religions obviously have their differences, both from each other and from many kinds of secular ethics, but they do not seriously differ about moral values like these. It would be better to consider that each gives voice to the common ethical heritage of humanity in its own distinctive voice—but the heritage is common. The Dalai Lama, Tibetan Buddhist, even tells us that his religion is really Kindness—who is going to argue with that?

For another and contemporary statement of basic values, consider this statement of principles from the Unitarian Universalist Association:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person
- Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations

- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth . . .
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process . . .
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all

They mean their “universalism”! Very few, if any, world religions would disagree with these basic values—given, of course, their interpretations of them—and neither would secular systems of morality. For example, you will find a very similar list of basic moral values in the *United Nations Declaration of Human Rights* (there is an excerpt in chapter 5 as Reading 10), the aim of which is also to prohibit such evils as slavery, genocide, torture, sexism, racism, murder, assault, fraud, deceit, and intimidation. The hope, at least, was and is to advance such values in a trans-cultural as well as “trans-religious” way—to make it as widely acceptable and compelling as possible.

What are the sources of such values? God has a hand in it, on religious views, of course, as in those Ten Commandments again—words from On High. But that is hardly the end of it. We may ask *why* God would command or commend certain things and not others, or why (if you are a little less literal) the writers of sacred texts chose to express those particular values in such a way. Part of the answer is practical. A society would not last long if children did not honor their parents, for example. Our social instincts and our sympathies almost automatically incline us toward at least a degree of “care” toward others’ needs and expectations—following our definition of ethics in chapter 1.

The Unitarian Universalist statement identifies other sources as well, such as “direct experience of . . . mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures” and “words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love.” Again their point is that all religious traditions build upon such experiences and are inspired by particular prophetic and wise figures—again and unsurprisingly invoking broadly similar values—and, once again, so do many secular moral traditions, as I discuss in Part II of this book.

We should remember also that religions provide the only formal moral training many people ever get, in Sunday schools or their equivalents, as well as probably the most explicit advocacy for basic moral values, like love or honesty or even kindness. Moral values are also usually featured in sermons, celebrations, and community engagements. And if you are a member of a religious congregation and need help working through a moral issue, chances are you can and will go to that congregation’s spiritual leader for help. There aren’t many other professionals for whom ethical counseling is part of the job!

And finally, religious congregations also offer morally supportive communities, backed by long and honored histories of ethical thinking and moral engagement. In such a setting, you know that you aren’t in it alone.

Courage, reassurance, and sometimes just company are all key to embracing moral values, acting on them, and sticking with it—and all come with a conscious community whose shared beliefs may also help create tight bonds and trust.

ATHEISM AND ETHICS?

The text has just argued that religions are significant supporters and promoters of moral values. This does not mean, however, that moral values necessarily depend on religion. There are other paths into ethics as well.

Some believers seem to be unsure of this, or anyway confused by it. After all, religious ethics naturally refer moral values in some way to God or the gods. There are various ways to do this, each with its own complexities and issues (we'll consider one a bit more in Exercise 3.4). Regardless of how moral values are linked to God, though, any such link may well make it seem that moral values *depend* on God, so that if one were to think that God does not exist (atheism), or even have doubts ("agnosticism": that is, not knowing either way) then it might seem that ethics itself becomes doubtful or impossible. Might it not be that, in the famous words of one of the characters in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's great novel *The Brothers Karamazov*, "If God is dead, then everything is permitted"?

Empirically, the answer is clearly that ethics *is* possible without belief in God. Data show no difference or only small differences in ethical behavior between believers and non-believers. In some ways atheists are actually *more* moral. For example, one study showed that non-believers are more likely than believers to be generous or commit "random acts of kindness" such as offering a seat on a crowded bus. Religious people seem to be slightly more charitable in volunteer work, though slightly less charitable one-on-one. The differences are tiny, though, if there are differences at all. And that already, surely, makes the point. If somehow doubting or disbelieving the existence of God knocks away the very foundations of ethics, you'd expect to see huge ethical differences between believers and non-believers. In fact there is no such thing.

What about Hitler, Stalin, and other murderous figures in recent or not-so-recent history, whose actions are usually blamed on atheism? From an atheist point of view, their real failure was extreme dogmatism instead—a notable failing of religions too, alas. (Hitler, by the way, apparently did believe in God, though not a Christian one.) In any case, religions have committed great evils as well, such as centuries of slaughter of "infidels"; a long and painful record of demeaning and oppressing women; and sanctioning conquest and mass genocide, such as the Crusades and the Spanish Conquest of South America—all of which continue to reverberate in today's world.

There have been spectacularly ethically impressive believers: “prophetic women and men,” as the Unitarian Universalists put it, like Martin Luther King Jr., Florence Nightingale, and the Dalai Lama, whose words and deeds “challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love.” There have also been equally impressive non-believers, like Aung San Suu Kyi, Nelson Mandela, and Wangari Maathai. So we can also have some pride in humanity after all—all of us, religious and non-religious—and surely it is best to celebrate goodness wherever it turns up, rather than trying to rule anyone out of ethics because they do not share our cherished beliefs about other things.

Someone may still wonder how moral values are possible without God. It can indeed be hard to understand if one’s own ethics have been so insistently tied to a specific religion’s God. As we survey different families of moral values in Part II of this book, though, we will explore a whole range of alternative answers. The ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle grounded ethics in the human essence. The 18th-century Prussian philosopher Immanuel Kant made a valiant effort to base ethics on pure logical consistency alone. More modern views relate ethics to meeting definite, concrete, basic human needs—sometimes in a formula like “the greatest good of the greatest number”—and/or to the “social contract.” You’ll recall that this book’s own basic definition holds that ethics arises out of basic needs and interpersonal attentiveness, powered by our social instincts. Whether God exists or not, basic needs and legitimate expectations certainly do!

RELIGIOUS ETHICS AS A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Most religions also understand moral values as *complex*. Medieval Christianity developed elaborate methods for moral decision making based on analogies to settled cases (*casuistry*). Muslim ethical thinking has the additional complication of politics, since Islam does not separate church and state. Judaism offers volume upon volume of intricate rabbinical discussion of all kinds of moral issues in light of Torah. These constitute the Talmud, Judaism’s second-most honored text—a book of *disputations*, and celebrated as such. Once again, careful thinking and interpretation are always necessary.

All of these religions are also changing and adapting. Of course they work from their existing bodies of doctrine, interpretation, and experience. But experience keeps changing! In America in the 1960s, for example, the big challenge was civil rights. Most established white churches entered the decade on the side of segregation—in fact, Martin Luther King Jr.’s stirring “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” was actually written to his fellow clergymen, white Southerners who had condemned early civil rights boycotts and other new

non-violent actions as “unwise and untimely.” The black churches led the way, exhorting, sheltering, and offering hope and fellowship in the struggle, and eventually white churches rose to the challenge to do better. Then came the Vietnam War; then the rise of multiculturalism; and now, especially after 9/11, new challenges and imperatives of inter-faith understanding.

New strands emerge even within what we might have thought were long-understood texts or traditions. For example, the status of women is today a point of increasing change for all of the established major religions. The Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—all arose within a cultural context in which male dominance was assumed and assured. The original texts describe God (mostly) as male; his prophets are almost all male; and it was Eve, made as a helpmate to Adam, who is supposed to have forever brought blame upon her sex for bringing sin into the world. For Christians, the letters of St. Paul often explicitly endorse the subordination of women, for example in 1 Timothy 11–12: “Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent.”

At the same time, though, there are counter-indications, brought into prominence as women gained some standing and voice in modern times and began to argue that the prevailing sexism in religion, as in society generally, is not somehow mandated by a divine scheme of things but is the result instead of a prejudiced reading of Scripture itself. Remarkably, for example, there are actually two creation narratives, and in the first—Genesis 1—man and woman are created together, as equals. Jesus’s acceptance of certain women as equals to men was revolutionary for his time. Since the 1980s the World Council of Churches has strongly advocated for the full participation of women and the equal inclusion of women’s experiences and perspectives, as well as those of other marginalized peoples and groups, in religious practice and theology at all levels, to some effect: many denominations now do ordain women, though many others do not.

Hindu widows are no longer required to throw themselves upon their husband’s funeral pyres—though they are often social isolates for the rest of their lives if they don’t. Taliban hard-liners still firebomb girls’ schools in Afghanistan: their God apparently wants only men to be educated. Conclaves of white-haired celibate men still make Catholic family policy, though it is routinely disregarded by many practicing Catholics (American Catholic women have abortions at higher than the national rate, for example, and 28% of American Catholics are divorced). Pope Francis has signaled more flexibility on some of these issues than his predecessors—but time will tell. Generally what it tells is that change and adaptation are inevitable.

Most religious texts say little or nothing about ecology or climate change, but now all of the major religions are working out their own forms of environmentalism. Religious leaders of our time, from the Dalai Lama to Eastern Orthodoxy’s Bartholomew I, have spoken for nature in the strongest terms.

Bartholomew, mincing no words, condemns environmental degradation as a sin. Pope Francis's most emphatic and influential encyclical to date has been *Laudato si'*, which focuses specifically on climate change as a justice issue, both for future generations and for Earth's poor right now. The Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences issued a similar declaration on climate change in the wake of Francis's encyclical, calling for Muslims everywhere to help stop climate change. Hundreds of Jewish rabbis signed a rabbinic letter on the climate crisis, and the Dalai Lama has publicly endorsed the Pope's encyclical, calling it "wonderful." There is even an Evangelical Environmental Network (also in league with Jewish and Catholic environmental groups in the National Religious Partnership for the Environment) that affirms "Creation Care" as a moral imperative. Individual churches here at home embrace environmental responsibility and are cleaning up their own acts, trying to go greener and even asking questions like "What Would Jesus Drive?"

This is not a question that Jesus himself asked. Neither Moses nor Buddha nor Mohammed nor Lao Tsu talked about sustainable energy or "Creation Care" or any such thing as climate change or sins against the environment. Yet this is what their legacies now seem, to many of their followers, to ask of us. Theologians across the Abrahamic traditions take issue, for example, with the traditional reading of Genesis as a basis for "subduing" and exploiting the earth: the real implication, they argue, is more like stewardship.

In 1985, the Unitarians added another basic principle to the preceding list of six, which dates from the 1960s. The seventh is "Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part," which is linked to a newly-affirmed "source" too: the "Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature." In 1960, this was probably unimaginable even to "universalists." Now it is felt to be *compelling*. As the Quakers say, it seems that the truth is continually revealed.

FINDING SHAREABLE TERMS

You already see, then, that religions do not somehow stand apart from secular change or speak with one voice to the day's moral struggles. Quite the contrary: they share the same basic values and are subject to the same currents and countercurrents of contention and uncertainty and change. Not only do the world's great religions sometimes vary from each other—so do their denominations, and even specific congregations within denominations. Even individual religious persons may find themselves, in their own thinking, pulled in different directions.

Despite how people sometimes talk, then, there is really no such thing as "the" Christian view of gay marriage or unbridled capitalism or "the" Islamic view of the status of women or of the religious sanction for war, any more

than there is any one Jewish or Buddhist (or atheist!) view either. There are *many* Christian views, just as (and for the same reasons that) there are many views in general.

Once again, all of this thinking and rethinking, this challenging and moral back-and-forth, is the norm. In fact, on the more philosophical view of this book, at least, we should *welcome* it as part of the interest and depth of ethics. In any case, welcome or not, the key response to any religious dogmatist, as to any other kind of dogmatist, is that there are people with at least as much intelligence and good faith who hold opposite views, based as thoroughly and conscientiously on their experience and training as our own dogmatists' views are on ours. The only option, in or out of religion, is open-ended discussion.

How do we proceed when religion seems to divide us on ethical matters? The answer is more or less the same as when we are morally divided for any other reason. As chapter 2 suggested, part of the very point of ethics is to help us find ways to think and act together when we do have basic disagreements but must still work out some shared values to live by. The main way we do so is by *finding shareable terms and arguments*.

You, or some tight group of which you are a member, may be totally persuaded of a particular moral position already. Appeals to a specific Bible, or specific interpretation of a Bible, may help guide those who share that Bible or that interpretation. Still, when the task is to persuade others—all of us, in the broader and more diverse moral community that includes differently religious people as well as non-religious people—then the appeal must be to mutually agreeable starting points. That is what I mean by “shareable”: common starting points. This is true whether your own tight group is religious or based on something else. In any case, what's required are not pronouncements but arguments: you need to give reasons that address listeners in their own terms, and to acknowledge and speak to counter-arguments as well.

For example, consider once again Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical *Laudato si'*. Popes, of course, officially speak to Catholics, who number over a billion today. But Francis's reach extends far beyond his Catholic followers: in this essay, he is really speaking to the whole world. He also does not speak specifically just from Catholic (or just Christian, or even just theistic) values or texts or beliefs, but—again—from the broadest human values. He troubles our consumerism, our faith in technology, political shortsightedness, and the economic inequalities that force the world's poor to bear the brunt of an imbalanced system. Social equity is a key argument: overall, those who have contributed the least to global climate change are the most impacted by it. His broad reach appears even in his subtitle: “On Care for Our Common Home”—that is, Earth. We're all in this together, and together we must find our way through.

Francis ends by calling for “a new way of thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature.” Actually it is not that new:

“green” thinkers have been working toward such a thing at least since, well, Thoreau. Thinkers outside the religions have also been arguing that a very large shift in ideas is needed—away from the image of humans as separate from nature or lords over it, an image that has also been blamed partly on the prevailing Western religions. Nonetheless, Francis has given it a new visibility and urgency in the larger debate. In this way he seems to be making himself, as the recent Pope John Paul II’s biographer called him, “the world’s conscience” and “a pope for the world, not just the Church.”

It is a sign of Francis’s reach, perhaps, that accompanying his encyclical, among many worldwide celebrations, was a projection of stunningly beautiful images of endangered animals and forests onto the front of St. Peter’s basilica, Catholicism’s holiest site, whose beauty brought many observers, both Catholic and non-Catholic, to tears. And others to anger: the same slideshow was criticized by some traditionalists as inappropriate for St. Peter’s, or even “pagan.” Whatever you may think of it, though, it clearly spoke to all of us, like the encyclical itself, and in provocative and compelling ways. What we share is as much the ambivalence and the struggle as, so far at least, any final conclusions. Francis is making an *argument*, in shareable terms, not a pronouncement—though, technically, he could.

This book should help you find shareable terms. You will learn to identify the values at stake in ethical issues, both shared and not shared, and will develop a variety of tools to help you address those values and issues more clearheadedly, collaboratively, and creatively. You will see, I hope, that there are ways to enter the ethical discussion not just from, say, a Catholic or Muslim or agnostic or atheist point of view, but instead as people united by certain basic values that we aim to understand and put into practice together, drawing on our traditions as complementary ways of understanding those values, for sure, but meanwhile also valuing our disagreements as invitations to more learning. The truth may be “continually revealed,” but clearly it is not an easy process. Still, it is the only one we’ve got.

LET THE STORIES BE STORIES

All of the world’s great religious traditions offer a rich bounty of stories. Many of them are moral stories, and naturally we look to them for moral guidance—which is why we so often speak of “the moral of the story.” Those stories that are part of a religion’s Bible often claim a special authority that makes their interpretation both essential and, well, contentious.

The stories are often fascinating and deep. Whole generations of devout people have immersed themselves in them. But again: precisely because our religious stories are so often rich, poetic, and complex, they seldom yield clear, specific guidance in specific situations—certainly not in the

problematic situations that really concern us. They are contentious because they are ambiguous, and thus they invite (surprise!) more *thinking*.

Consider this parable from the Sufi master Yusuf of Andalusia:

Nuri Bey was a respected and reflective Albanian, who had married a wife much younger than himself. One evening when he had returned home earlier than usual, a faithful servant came to him and said: "Your wife, our mistress, is acting suspiciously. She is in her apartments with a huge chest, large enough to hold a man, which belonged to your grandmother. It should contain only a few ancient embroideries. I believe that there may now be much more in it. She will not allow me, your oldest retainer, to look inside."

Nuri went to his wife's room, and found her sitting disconsolately beside the massive wooden box. "Will you show me what is in the chest?" he asked.

"Because of the suspicion of a servant, or because you do not trust me?"

"Would it not be easier just to open it, without thinking about the undertones?" asked Nuri.

"I do not think it possible."

"Where is the key?"

She held it up. "Dismiss the servant and I will give it to you."

The servant was dismissed. The woman handed over the key and herself withdrew, obviously troubled in mind.

Nuri Bey thought for a long time. Then he called four gardeners from his estate. Together they carried the chest by night unopened to a distant part of the grounds, and buried it. The matter was never referred to again.

Sufis have been teaching with this story for eight hundred years. But exactly what lesson does it teach? You might take some time to figure out how *you* would interpret it—and see how your interpretation compares with others.

Is Nuri Bey's act a wise one? Does the story mean to suggest that it is? He doesn't push the point—he doesn't open the chest—but he apparently doesn't entirely trust his wife either. Or in burying the chest is his idea to also bury mistrust—is he still trying to avoid the "undertones"? Would his wife agree that he succeeded at this? Is the "moral" therefore that certain matters between husband and wife shouldn't be pushed?

And—after all—what was in the box? Is it obvious that his wife is hiding a lover? This is probably what we think at first, but could it be something else—a present, maybe, that she is not prepared to give him yet? Some other kind of magical possibility that his jealousy "buries" for them? Notice that for *her* the issue is trust. "Because of the suspicion of a servant," she asks, "or because you do not trust me?" She "herself withdrew, obviously troubled in mind"—but not in denial or defiance.

The Sufis themselves, by the way, value such stories precisely because they *are* complex and unclear in this way. The whole point is to explore their

hidden and deeper meanings and symbolism. To insist that they mean one and only one thing misses the very point—so they would say. How many other stories are like that?

THE SIN OF SODOM?

Here's another religious story—this one a little closer to home. When some Christians insist that the Bible condemns homosexuality, a common scriptural reference is to the story of the destruction of Sodom.

The two angels came to Sodom in the evening; and Lot was sitting in the gate of Sodom. When Lot saw them, he rose to meet them . . . and said, "My lords, turn aside, I pray you, to your servant's house, and spend the night, and wash your feet; then you may rise up early and go on your way." . . . He urged them strongly; so they turned aside to him and entered his house; and he made them a feast, and baked unleavened bread, and they ate.

But before they lay down, the men of the city, the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house, and they called to Lot, "Where are the men who came to you tonight? Bring them out to us, that we may know [i.e., rape] them." Lot went out of the door to the men, shut the door after him, and said, "I beg you, my brothers, do not act so wickedly. . . . Do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof. Behold, I have two daughters who have not known man; let me bring them out to you, and do to them as you please; only do nothing to these men, for they have come under the shelter of my roof." But [the crowd] said, "Stand back!" . . . Then they pressed hard against Lot, and drew near to break the door. But [the angels] put forth their hands and drew Lot into the house to them, and shut the door. And they struck with blindness the men who were at the door of the house, so that they wearied themselves groping for the door. (Genesis 19:1–11)

In the story, God destroys the city the next day, after helping Lot and his family to flee.

So what is the true sin of Sodom? The story itself actually does not say. Some insist that it is homosexuality. And it's true that homosexual acts (of a sort) are threatened in the story. Nonetheless, the insistence that the sin *must* be homosexuality—that no other reading is even possible, and no other possible sin matters—misses the ambiguity and depth of the story itself.

An ancient reading is that the true crimes of Sodom are its shocking level of violence and its extreme disrespect for strangers. That's certainly in the story too—in fact, one might have thought, a lot more central to it. Another, traditional Jewish reading stressed Sodom's extreme inhospitality. As the prophet Ezekiel put it, "Behold, this was the guilt of . . . Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, surfeit of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy" (Ezekiel 16:49). On this view, the story is really a call to social justice.

Moderns might suppose that if anything is specifically condemned in this story, it is rape. After all, rape is what the crowd had on their minds. It turns out that (male) gang rape was a common practice of the times for humiliating enemies. So maybe that is the true sin of Sodom—the readiness to sexualize humiliation?

But we can't stop there either. Surely it is deeply disconcerting that Lot, who is presented as the only decent man in Sodom, actually offers the crowd his own daughters in the place of his guests. The angels prevent these rapes too from happening. But God still saves Lot from the destruction of the rest of the city. Does not Lot's treatment of his own daughters offend God? Is the shelter of his roof for strangers more important than the shelter of his home for his own children?

We are reminded that this story comes from a time and a culture radically different from our own—and arguably much less ethical: when, for one thing, women were regarded only as a father or husband's property, for him to dispose of as he saw fit (though honestly, even then it is hard to imagine such an act, let alone God approving of it). And it therefore becomes hard to take the story, whatever exactly it condemns or doesn't condemn, as the ethical last word. That is, even if the text were totally clear that the sin of Sodom was homosexuality, why should we trust the story's condemnation of it, when so much that is truly ethically outrageous passes without comment?

In any case, again, the main point can hardly be said to be *clear*. You begin to see why, for some religious traditions, exploring the interpretation of such stories is the core of the worship service itself. Christians inherit long traditions of debate and disagreement about Scripture, and Judaism's second most sacred text, the Talmud, is essentially a history of (loving!) disputation about the Torah.

Reading the stories in this way is, once again, a shareable approach—a kind of common ground. It's the opposite of trying to squeeze a single moral out of them, which barely is to read them as *stories* at all. Let us approach them, together, as the complex, many-layered narratives that they are.

THINKING FOR YOURSELF

The Bible is not all stories, of course. Sometimes God explicitly commands certain acts and condemns others. Here too, though, for better or worse, it turns out that things are complicated. Here too is a large element of interpretation and choice. Ethical thinking remains essential!

THE NEED FOR INTERPRETATION

"Thou shalt not kill" seems the clearest of the Ten Commandments. But almost all Christians and Jews eat other animals, which requires killing on

a massive scale. Many Christians and Jews support capital punishment. Most fight in wars. Some also believe that suicide may be permissible too.

The Torah reads, “Thou shalt not *murder*.” This seems a little more reasonable: it is at least arguable that killing in war or in the electric chair is not murder (though it is also arguable that it is), and the notion of murder is implicitly limited to other humans (though it is arguable that it shouldn’t be). Once we get into alternative translations, however, we return quickly to the question of alternative interpretations. After all, the word in the traditional Christian phrasing—both in the King James Bible and the Revised Standard Version—is “kill,” so if you take it literally, at least in English, that should be the end of the matter.

Also, to say “Thou shalt not murder” is not helpful as a practical guide. In effect it says: “Don’t kill unjustly.” But when is killing unjust? Is capital punishment, for example, “murder”? You may have views about the answers to these questions, but they aren’t given in the commandment “Thou shalt not murder.” One way or the other we are back to, well, interpretation.

Or again: we are commanded to honor the Sabbath. But when is the Sabbath? Even this simplest of questions is unclear. Jews celebrate Sabbath from Friday sunset until Saturday sunset. Early Christians followed Jewish practice, only gradually shifting the observance to Sundays (dishearteningly, to distinguish themselves from Jews). Some Christians still celebrate Sabbath on Saturdays (the “Seventh-Day Adventists”). Is there a “right” answer? Not, it seems, in the text. . . .

WE STILL DECIDE

There are also a large number of explicit commandments that almost no one takes seriously and almost all of us feel free to ignore. Not too many people even “Honor the Sabbath” any more, come to think of it—whenever we think it is. The Torah/ Old Testament book of Leviticus famously condemns eating pigs or shellfish (chapter 11) and even cutting the edges of men’s beards or wearing clothes made of mixed fabrics (chapter 19). Some of these commandments are put in the strongest terms, too (Leviticus calls eating shellfish an “abomination,” and the punishment for “abomination” is usually stoning). Still, almost all Jews and Christians feel entirely free to go their own way—saying, for example, that these commandments are just “historical relics,” like dietary restrictions that once made sense but no longer do.

Attitudes are changing, but for some people it continues to be significant that Leviticus also condemns (male) homosexual acts (20:13). “God hates homosexuality” is the bumpersticker version. The text says it perfectly clearly: male homosexual acts are “abominations” too. Yet the drivers of the cars

with those bumperstickers are very rarely wearing uncut beards or 100% cotton shirts. They are cherry-picking their abominations. If even an explicit Biblical condemnation can be readily disregarded in one case, then it cannot somehow be decisive in the other, as if no critical thinking or change were possible. Of course it is possible: they are practicing it themselves, only not consistently.

People who continue reading Exodus beyond the Ten Commandments are often disturbed to discover that in the very next chapter the Bible seems to condone slavery:

When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing. If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, his wife shall go out with him. . . . [But] when a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not go out as the male slaves do. . . . When a man strikes his slave, male or female, with a rod and the slave dies under his hand, he shall be punished. But if the slave survives a day or two, he is not to be punished; for the slave is his money. (Exodus 21:2–3, 7, 20–21)

These passages were used by American slaveholders during the struggle over abolition to show that God approved of slavery. Now, with slavery gone and its evil recognized, the rationalization is transparent. Yet the words are there. Once again the text is quite clear. It does not say that slavery is wrong. Literally, it condones slavery under pretty broad conditions.

We can appreciate the writers of Exodus for what they tried to do: adapt a living ethical tradition to the needs of the time. No doubt these rules promised at least some small improvement over slavery as it had been practiced. They began to give (some) slaves (some) rights. But now, of course, times have changed—drastically. We still have a living tradition (again, *many* living traditions), but three thousand years have changed everything. We need to rethink and adapt the tradition, just as the prophets and lawgivers of Biblical times did. And that may mean—as clearly it does mean in the case of these words about slavery—that we need to go beyond their words to the *spirit* of their acts and of our shared tradition, as full of ambiguity and uncertainty as it is. Again, there is no refuge in the text, not even when it is fairly clear—there is no alternative but to decide for ourselves.

A BIBLICAL IDEAL

On the angels' way to Sodom, they visit the patriarch Abraham in his desert tent. As they leave, they declare God's intention to destroy Sodom if the rumors about it are true. Abraham is troubled by this. He cannot see the justice of killing the innocent along with the wicked. So Abraham,

says the Bible, “went before the Lord.” He actually took it upon himself to question God!

Abraham drew near and said: “Wilt thou indeed destroy the righteous with the wicked? Suppose there are fifty righteous within the city; wilt thou then destroy the place and not spare it for the fifty righteous who are in it? Far be it from thee to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous fare as the wicked! Far be that from thee! Shall not the Judge of all the Earth do right?”

And the Lord said, “If I find at Sodom fifty righteous in the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake.” Abraham answered, “Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord, I who am but dust and ashes. Suppose five of the fifty righteous are lacking. Wilt thou destroy the whole city for lack of five?” And He said, “I will not destroy it if I find forty-five there.” Again he spoke to him, and said, “Suppose forty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of forty I will not do it.” Then he said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak. Suppose thirty are found there.” He answered, “I will not do it, if I find thirty there.” He said, “Behold, I have taken upon myself to speak to the Lord. Suppose twenty are found there.” He answered, “For the sake of twenty I will not destroy it.”

Then [Abraham] said, “Oh let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak again but this once. Suppose ten are found there.” The Lord answered, “For the sake of ten I will not destroy it.” And the Lord went his way, when he had finished speaking to Abraham; and Abraham returned to his place. (Genesis 18: 23–33)

What is the Bible telling us here? Surely not that we should simply do what we’re told and accept whatever authority—even the highest religious authority of all—decides to do. Quite the contrary. Abraham, the revered forefather, did not simply obey. He would not accept injustice even when God Himself proposed to do it. Abraham went to God—Abraham who acknowledges himself to be, in comparison, “but dust and ashes”—and complained. He questioned, he challenged. “Shall not the Judge of all the Earth do right?”

Abraham thought for himself. Moreover, he was honored for doing so. God listened and answered. Indeed Lot himself was saved, the Bible says later, because God was “mindful of Abraham.”

Mustn’t we do the same? Of course I don’t mean that we must never listen to others. Listening to good advice and thinking about new perspectives are crucial. Religious texts too have long been sources of great inspiration and stimulation. Use them. Speak the shared language; retell the stories. Still, in the end, it is up to *us* to interpret, ponder, and decide what they mean. So the next time someone acts as though it is yours only to obey the commands of God (according to their interpretation), or yours only to obey some other authority—remember Abraham!

READING 6

“Making Peace with the Sword Verse”

JAMAL RAHMAN

ABRAHAM BECAME UNEASY when the killing of innocents seemed to be ordered by God Himself. So might we. (What about the children of Sodom? The fewer than ten innocent men? The women? Nor is Sodom by any means the only such occasion.) Not only was the Bible once regularly cited in support of slavery; it contains many other rules and commandments that seem at best quaint and at worst unloving, intolerant, even barbaric. Certainly Christianity's critics are aware of these things, however seldom they are talked about in Christian circles, and some bring them up regularly and hold them against Christianity and the whole Christian world.

This chapter has argued, in response, that *interpretation* is necessary, that religious ethical traditions are living and complex traditions, carrying forward much that is good and indeed vital, but also, quite likely, much that is problematic and even, by present lights, unethical; much that may be misinterpreted, pulled out of context; distorted by our wish to avoid thinking for ourselves or admitting that things are not really so obvious or nailed down. All of this, again, is what makes religious thinking so potent, so hard, and yet also so interesting.

In the reading that follows, a Muslim addresses the same sort of problem in the Quran. Just like the Bible, the Quran at points also seems unloving, intolerant, even barbaric. Islam's critics also bring up some of those passages regularly, especially in the wake of the increased tensions between the Christian/secular and Muslim worlds in the last decade. But Islam, like Christianity and Judaism, also has an interpretive tradition that addresses these issues—once again a form of thinking for oneself, and even, as Imam Jamal Rahman argues here, required by the faith itself. Interestingly, and very much in character, Rahman also hints at a similar process (and a similar need for it) in Hindu thinking in turn.

Jamal Rahman is one of three Seattle-area religious leaders who reached out to one another in the wake of the attacks of September 11th, 2001, to create what eventually became the “Interfaith Amigos.” The three of them—Jewish rabbi, Christian minister, Muslim imam—now travel and speak widely, their website says, to “explore an inclusive spirituality to promote healing that expresses as concrete environmental, social, and political action.” Rahman

Jamal Rahman, “Making Peace with the Sword Verse,” *Yes! Magazine*, Oct. 13, 2010. Reproduced with permission.

is also the cofounder and Muslim Sufi Minister at Interfaith Community Church in Seattle and adjunct faculty member at Seattle University. This article appeared originally in *Yes! Magazine*.

The sacred texts of all religions contain many verses of exquisite beauty and wisdom that fully satisfy the universal longings of the human heart. But it is equally true that all our texts also contain painful and awkward verses that do not enrich the human spirit or support universal values. To those who may be offended by this second statement because they believe their scriptures are the inspired and irreproachable words of God, spiritual teachers explain that scriptures might be divine, but the human consciousness with which we approach our scriptures is less than perfect. In the wise words of Mahatma Gandhi, “God reveals His truth to instruments that are imperfect.”

FACING THE DIFFICULT VERSES

For purposes of healing the wounds between people of faith, and understanding the scriptures that inform our beliefs and practices, it is helpful to acknowledge and embrace the difficult verses in our holy scriptures and spend time with them. Rather than avoiding them or going through mental gymnastics to justify them, we should consider them an invitation to allow a higher light from within to shine on them. As the Prophet Muhammad said, we need to move from “knowledge of the tongue” to “knowledge of the heart.”

This is a large part of the work that my Interfaith Amigos and I have been doing in the years since 9/11. Within the goodwill and safety of our trusted friendship, we are able to address the difficult passages in our scriptures and expand our understanding by bringing to bear the “knowledge of the heart” that has been developing steadily in the years of our friendship. The willingness to bare our vulnerabilities and share our feelings honestly about our own awkward verses and also about verses in each others’ scriptures that give us pain has greatly fostered authenticity in our relationships with ourselves, with each other, and with the sacred texts that we hold so dear.

For me as a Muslim, the Quran offers insights and wisdom for this endeavor. “Of knowledge We have given you but a little,” says the Holy Book (17:85), and every verse has many levels of meaning and “none understands except those who possess the inner heart” (3:7). Paradoxes exist, says the Quran, because, “Of everything We have created opposites so that you might know that only

God is One" (51:49). When all else fails, the Quran also offers two ardent prayers: "O my Sustainer! Open for me my heart! (20:25), and "O my Sustainer, increase me in knowledge!" (20:114).

SO WHAT ABOUT THE SWORD VERSES?

Among the most problematic verses in the Quran are the so-called "sword verses" exemplified by the verse commonly summarized as "Kill the unbeliever." Sadly and tragically, this verse has been quoted countless times both by Islamic extremists in support of terrorism against the "ungodly" West and by misinformed Christians as proof that Islam was spread at the point of a sword. But neither side is correct in its understanding of this verse.

In the first place, the verse is seriously limited and defined by its historical context. This 7th-century revelation came at a time when the Islamic community in Arabia was a tiny embryonic group in Medina under constant attack by the Quraysh tribe and their allies in Mecca, who were overwhelmingly superior in arms and numbers. In the second place, the verse is even more seriously qualified by its textual context. Some of the qualifications appear in chapter 2. The verse immediately preceding the sword verse says, "Fight in the way of God with those who fight you, but begin not hostilities. Lo! Allah loveth not aggressors" (2:190), while the verses immediately following it say, "but if they cease, God is Oft-forgiving, most Merciful . . . let there be no hostility . . . and know that God is with those who restrain themselves" (2:192-4).

Thus the verses that surround the sword verse soften its sharp edges. The verse refers to defensive fighting and if the attacker inclines to peace, the Muslim must cease fighting. However, even if I factor in those qualifications, I have to acknowledge that it is extremely uncomfortable and confusing to read "Kill the unbeliever" as a divine revelation. Why would the All-Merciful and All-Powerful God, who has infused every human with divine breath and holds every human heart between divine fingers, instruct anyone to kill? Why would the "Light of the Heavens and Earth" advise a Muslim engaged in battle against his attackers to "smite them at their necks" (47:4)? Some of my co-religionists may call me naive and unrealistic and refer me to other verses in the Quran, but when presented with such a puzzlement, I take refuge in Rumi's utterance: "Sell your cleverness and buy bewilderment." What else can one do with a verse like this?

A general principle of Quranic interpretation is that if a verse does not seem to support the overall message of the Quran or

reflect God's divine attributes, we have to dig deeper to achieve a more enlightened understanding. So in addition to establishing the contextual limits on this particular revelation—allowing one to kill only in self-defense—it is critical to emphasize that this verse is not about a divine permission to kill non-believers simply because of their non-belief or to gain power or control. Such an interpretation would place the verse in direct conflict with the spirit and content of the universal verses in the Quran.

In an abundance of verses celebrating pluralism and diversity, the Quran explains that God could easily have made all of humanity “one single people” but instead, by divine design, chose to establish diversity so that you might “vie, then, with one another other in doing good works!” (5:48) and “get to know one another” (49:13). The Holy Book emphatically says, “Let there be no compulsion in religion” (2:256) and makes it clear that the passage to heaven depends not on gender or religion but essentially on doing “righteous deeds” (4:124 and 5:69). Except when in mortal danger at the hands of an enemy, Muslims are commanded to repel evil with something which is better so that an enemy becomes a bosom friend (41:34).

A METAPHORICAL UNDERSTANDING

In a continuing attempt to advance my understanding of this difficult sword verse, I have discussed it with both scholars and students. Some of the scholars, who happen to be Hindus who are fully conversant with the Quran, believe that the revelation in question is about God's exhortation to humanity to be courageous and take action in the face of unavoidable attack by others. Indeed, this line of thought is consistent with another revelation in the Quran: “For if God had not enabled people to defend themselves against one another, monasteries and churches and synagogues and mosques—in which God's name is abundantly extolled—would surely have been destroyed” (22:40).

Reinforcing the need for courage when under attack, the scholars pointed to an epic conversation in the Bhagavad Gita between Krishna and the mortal Prince Arjuna on the eve of engaging in the battle of Kurukshetra. Viewing the multitude of soldiers on the opposing side, the prince hesitates and laments to Krishna about spilling the blood of “cousins.” Krishna berates the mortal for using false piety to cover up his fear and lack of courage and tells him that without action, the cosmos would fall out of order. Then,

Krishna utters the immortal words, “If any man thinks he slays, and another thinks he is slain, neither knows the way of truth. The Eternal in man cannot kill; the Eternal in man cannot die.”

The students, who were young Muslims in high school, suggested that the verse should be interpreted metaphorically. After all, they pointed out, the Quran clearly states that some verses are literal and some are metaphorical (3:7) but it doesn’t say which ones are which! To these young, creative minds, the sword verse is about slaying the idols of arrogance and ignorance within ourselves.

And finally, I consulted my old friend, the 13th-century sage Rumi, who reminded me that any interpretation depends on our level of consciousness and our intention, on what we hope to learn. “A bee and wasp drink from the same flower,” says Rumi. “One produces nectar and the other, a sting.” When I’m troubled by the way the sword verse could be interpreted, I remember that the way of Islam is to produce nectar.



FOR REVIEW

1. How does the text argue that religious values are common human values?
2. How can atheists have ethics?
3. How does the text argue that religious ethics are a “learning experience”?
4. How do the leading religions’ struggles over the status of women illustrate the themes of this chapter?
5. What are “shareable terms”?
6. How might Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato si’* illustrate the possibilities of shareable terms?
7. What are two possible interpretations of the story of Nuri Bey?
8. What are two possible interpretations of the story of the destruction of Sodom?
9. How does the text argue that “we still decide” even when explicit commandments tell us what to do?
10. How does Abraham argue with God? What is the consequence?
11. According to the text, how can we “Remember Abraham!”?
12. What are two possible interpretations of the Quran’s “Sword Verse”?



FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

3.1 CARRY ON

Is there a distinctive way that you approach ethical questions that traces back to your religious background? If so, what is it? If you are religious, explore the ethics of your religion more fully. Ask your religious guides or leaders for some guidance—and ask to explore a variety of views within your own tradition.

Next, explore ethics in religious frameworks other than your own. Talk to people from other traditions. Take a course in comparative religions. And read. Learn how other people see things. Is there a distinctive way that they approach ethical questions that traces back to their religious background? If so, what is it? You don't have to give up your own beliefs to do so, of course, but you will certainly come back to them with greater understanding.

3.2 READ THE OLD STORIES

What Christians call the Old Testament is shared, in one way or the other, with Jews and also in part with Muslims. Those stories also are morally complex—and therefore fascinating. They still repay study and thinking, regardless of exactly what you believe.

Abraham, the chosen forefather of the forefathers, raises the knife over one son and exiles the other, mirroring the immensely painful divide of closely related Semitic peoples to this day. Since he was willing to argue with God over the fate of Sodom, why did he not, only a decade or so later, argue with God over the fate of his very own sons? And why would God ask him to sacrifice Isaac or exile Ishmael in the first place? (Don't just say "to put him to the test." There is more depth in the story. Why would God need or want to put Abraham to the test? And why this particular test?) Were these (and others) good acts? Did God think so? How could we tell?

Consider the Cain and Abel story in Genesis 4:1–16: the story of the first murder in history, mythologically speaking. Why does God reject Cain's offering and accept Abel's, thus setting off Cain's anger and the murder—a fairly foreseeable result? What does Cain mean when he asks, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Is the moral of the story that he *is* (that we *are*) his/our brothers' (one another's) keepers? If so, or in any case, why doesn't God say so—why doesn't God answer him? Isn't Cain partly suggesting that *God* ought to be Abel's "keeper"—that God also bears some responsibility for what happened? Does God dodge the question?

In the New Testament, Jesus's disciples constantly complain that his parables are confusing and ambiguous. (And don't you think it's interesting that the Bible reports this?) Each has been interpreted in many ways—put to many uses. Might they be more than a little like the story of Nuri Bey?

Could it be—could it just possibly be—that what Jesus meant to teach us with these stories is not an exact moral lesson or rule but something more like a sense for the subtlety of things, maybe the mysterious ways of God?

Some intriguing parables and sayings of Jesus can be found in Matthew 6:25–33, Matthew 20:1–16, Luke 19:12–26, and Luke 9:23–27, just for a few of many examples.

A variant: Look carefully at the ethical arguments of religious leaders. For example, why do the popes oppose birth control? Read Pope Paul VI's *Humanae Vitae* and other relevant papal encyclicals (most papal encyclicals are available directly from the United States Catholic Conference Publishing Service at www.nccbuscc.org) and find out. It's *not* because the embryo or fetus is a human being—in many cases, there's no fertilization at all. So why is it? Once you figure out the argument (it *is* an argument, not a mere pronouncement) ask yourself whether the values to which Pope Paul appeals are specific to Catholicism or more general. You may not necessarily agree, but there's often a lot to be learned anyway.

Another remarkable encyclical is John Paul II's *Laborem Exercens* (1981). John Paul's marriage of Christian humanism and Marxist influences here produces a widely applicable and eloquent plea for work and workplaces that befit human beings, and therefore a sharp critique of what John Paul calls the "economism" of both capitalism and communism. John Paul II also made himself an eloquent and persistent advocate of the Third World debt relief and income redistribution. Here too a pope entered the contemporary discussion in a way that was far broader and more powerful than a merely sectarian pronouncement.

Finally, consider moral stories from other religions and their sacred texts. Read the Quran. Read Zen stories in collections such as *Zen Flesh, Zen Bones*, compiled by Paul Reps and Nyogen Senzaki (Shambhala, 1994); and explore African stories, such as Mohammed Naseehu Ali, *The Prophet of Zongo Street* (Amistad, 2006); and Sufi stories, in lovely collections such as Idries Shah's *Tales of the Dervishes* (Penguin, 1993), and others.

3.3 ABORTION AND THE BIBLE

Nowhere does the Bible discuss abortion explicitly, but related themes do come up, and Christian pro-life advocates regularly cite certain passages that suggest that a fetus has human standing in the eyes of God. For example, there is a stirring passage in Psalms 139:

For thou didst form my inward parts; thou didst knit me together in my mother's womb. . . . My frame was not hidden from Thee, when I was being made in secret, intricately wrought in the depths of the earth. Thy eyes beheld my unformed substance, in thy book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me.

If God cares for us even in the womb, then, pro-life advocates conclude, there must be an “us” to care for: we must already exist as persons in God’s eyes.

However, others have questioned this reading of the passage, pointing out that it is more poetic than anything else (the Psalms are hardly meant literally) and is more concerned with creation in general than with the point at which life begins (indeed, the last two lines seem to suggest that God knows and cares for us even before we are in the womb, but it’s hardly plausible that we are fully human even *before* conception).

Christian pro-choice advocates, meanwhile, cite other passages that seem to suggest that abortion might be acceptable. One is in Exodus 21:

When men strive together, and hurt a woman with child, so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no harm follows, the one who hurt her shall be fined, according as the woman’s husband lays upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine.

The penalty for murder is death (e.g., in verse 12 of the same chapter: “Who strikes a man so that he dies shall be put to death”), so pro-choice Christians argue that the Bible can hardly consider causing the death of a fetus (miscarriage) to be murder if only a fine is specified as punishment.

On the other hand, the phrase “and no harm follows” is puzzling. Isn’t there necessarily harm to the fetus? From this pro-life advocates have taken heart, arguing that the passage is, well, ambiguous. The Hebrew phrase translated in the Revised Standard Version (given here) as “so that there is a miscarriage” *might* also be translated as “so that her child comes out” (apparently there is no ancient Hebrew word specifically for miscarriage), which *might* be read as meaning that birth occurs prematurely but with no (other?) harm to the baby—in which case the passage could have just the opposite meaning. The Greek version has still other ambiguities.

Here are some other places where the Christian Bible touches (or has been interpreted as touching) on the question of the status of fetal human life: Job 3 and 10, Ecclesiastes 4 and 6, Jeremiah 1, Luke 1. Read them (all), and read them in context (that is, read the whole chapters, even when only a few verses are usually cited; also, read all of Psalm 139 and Exodus 21, cited earlier). Then ask what you can conclude about what the Bible thinks of the status of fetal human life. Does a clear picture emerge from these chapters taken together? Does a clear picture emerge from any of them taken separately? Explain your answers. (Good luck!)

3.4 CAN GOD DEFINE THE GOOD?

Here’s an old philosophical paradox for you—something to think about. Are good things good because God says they are, or does God say they are good because they are good?

One view is: what's good is good because God says so. God's commanding something *defines* it as good. This view is called the *Divine Command Theory*.

The Divine Command Theory seems simple, straightforward, and—if you believe in God—pretty natural. That it leaves atheists and the nonreligious out in the cold is a problem, though: it would be odd to say that they had no moral values at all just because God doesn't come into the picture for them, even though they may take as much care for others' basic needs and/or legitimate expectations as the rest of us. And there certainly will be problems when the commands of God are unclear or the commands of one religion's God conflict with those of another's. But there is also an intriguing problem with this theory, quite different, first pointed out nearly 2,500 years ago by the Greek philosopher Socrates.

If God's commands alone define the good, then God's commands begin to seem arbitrary. Suppose that instead of commanding us not to kill, God had commanded us to kill. Thou *shalt* kill. According to the Divine Command Theory, then, killing would be good and refraining from killing would be bad.

But this can't be right. Killing really is wrong whether God says so or not. And in fact we do have reservations and second thoughts at some of the points in the Bible where God's own ethics actually seem, well, a little questionable. If the Divine Command Theory were true, Abraham's question—"Shall not the Judge of all the Earth do right?"—could not even be asked.

There's a related problem too. If the Divine Command Theory is true, it makes no sense to say "God is good." Whatever God commands is—well, whatever God commands. If God's commands *define* the good, then there is no point admiring God for God's goodness. (This is also why we can't respond by arguing that God never *would* command killing. Why not? *Whatever* God commanded, whatever God did, would be good—by definition.) But this seems, in a sense, to cheapen God. It ought to mean something (and God ought to want it to mean something) to say "God is good."

We could conclude that God says certain things are good because they *are* good. Then, however, we consider the good to be independent of God. To say "God is good" is in a certain sense to judge God. God's commands are not the end of the story: we must still decide whether or not God (or rather, God's many and varied interpreters) is right. In the abstract this may sound like some kind of heresy, but as I've just been arguing, we actually do it all the time, for example, when we disregard commandments that we consider outdated. What do *you* think?

NOTES

Peggy Morgan and Clive Lawton's *Ethical Issues in Six Religious Traditions* (Edinburgh University Press, second edition, 2007) offers a thorough and evenhanded overview of each of the great religious traditions' basic approach. A good introductory textbook is Mari Rapela Heidt, *Moral Traditions: An*

Introduction to World Religious Ethics (Anselm Academic, 2010). On current issues in religion and ethics, see the website of the PBS series “Religion and Ethics Newsweekly,” <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/>. On philosophical issues between ethics and religion, the “Ethics Updates” website offers extensive resources at <http://ethics.sandiego.edu/theories/Religion/index.asp>.

For the Unitarian Universalists’ statement of principles, see <http://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/principles>. On the changing status of women with religious traditions, a good place to start is Leona Anderson and Pamela Dickey Young, *Women and Religious Traditions* (Oxford, 3rd edition, 2015). For a survey of religions’ turn to environmentalism, see Roger Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and Our Planet’s Future* (Oxford, 2006). Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato si’* can be found at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html. See also Andrew Hoffman, “Laudato si’ and the Role of Religion in Shaping Humanity’s Response to Climate Change,” *The Solutions Journal*, Volume 6, Issue 5, December 2015, Pages 40–47 (<https://www.thesolutionsjournal.com/article/laudato-si-and-the-role-of-religion-in-shaping-humanitys-response-to-climate-change/>). Walter Sinott-Armstrong’s lively little book *Morality Without God?* (Oxford University Press, 2009) addresses believers who can’t imagine how a non-religious ethics is possible.

“The Ancient Coffin of Nuri Bey” comes from Idries Shah, *Tales of the Dervishes* (Penguin, 1970). Citations from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible are given in the text. On the Genesis passage cited in the text, remember that in Biblical Hebrew, “to know” means to have sexual intercourse. (Compare Genesis 4:1: “And Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain.”) The classic historical source on the Sodom story, as well as on evolving Christian attitudes toward homosexuality generally, is John Boswell’s *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (University of Chicago Press, 1980).

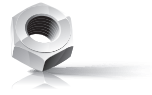
On arguing with God, see also Exodus 32:1–15, where Moses dissuades God from destroying Israel after the incident of the Golden Calf. Here Moses argues with God almost as with an equal. And the Bible explicitly says that, as a result, God “repented of the evil which He thought to do to His people.” I am grateful to my colleague J. Christian Wilson for help with Biblical references and translation issues.

For the original of the argument sketched in the section on “Can God Define the Good?” see Plato’s *Euthyphro*, available in many editions as well as in complete collections of Plato’s work. For a rigorous contemporary discussion of the problem, see James Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* (McGraw-Hill, many editions), chapter 4.

II



MORAL VALUES



Taking Values Seriously

Part II of this book offers a survey of moral values and the most prominent and useful frameworks that philosophers and others have developed to systematize and apply them. Chapter 4 begins that survey with an exploration of the nature of values generally, some guidelines for how to be more attentive to moral values when they arise, in all their concreteness and diversity, in real situations, and then an introduction of the main families into which they fall.

MORAL VALUES AMONG OTHERS

We hold many values. There is fairness, trustworthiness, the well-being of others and the world. We also value good neighbors, good music, good humor, daily exercise, children and parents, old friends and new, and many other things that are not moral values (not *immoral* values, simply *nonmoral* values). Truth, cleanliness, good sportsmanship, wilderness; life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; random kindness and senseless acts of beauty; the thrill of victory and sometimes even the agony of defeat—all of these are “values” in the broad sense.

Or rather, all of these are *examples* of values in a broad sense. They are all things that we value. But they do not tell us what values themselves *are*. A philosopher will ask: What do they all have in common that makes them all examples of “values”? We need a working definition of “value” in general.

Try this: our values are *those things we care about, that matter to us; those goals and ideals we aspire to and measure ourselves or others or our society by*. When I say that I value playing fair or staying healthy, then I mean (at least) that I am interested in these things, that I care about them, and probably that I do specific things to promote or safeguard them—certainly that I *would* under the right circumstances.

Notice that this definition does not say anything about where values ultimately come from or how they might be prioritized or evaluated or theorized. All of that comes later. Right now we just need a standard for classification. Notice also that nearly anything could be included. “Bad” or questionable or conflicting values count too. We value having a lot of stuff, driving fast, and

lording it over others too. Maybe we shouldn't, but sometimes we do. Pirates value their loot; addicts value their drugs; misers obsess over their money. Without all of this confusion and conflict, life would be a lot less interesting.

We may classify values in general into a variety of types. *Aesthetic* values have to do with art, beauty, and attractiveness. *Scientific* values have to do with knowledge, truth, experiment, and so on. *Economic* values have to do with production, efficiency, and market prices. *Instrumental* values have to do with the means to our ends: the effectiveness of technologies, the usefulness of our tools. There are other types too.

Moral values, then, are a kind of value distinct from those just listed, a subset of values generally. You know the examples: fairness, equality, respect, and responsibility; reducing pain and suffering; "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"; humility, benevolence, keeping your promises. From chapter 1 you also have a definition: ethics concerns *those values that give voice to the basic needs and legitimate expectations of others as well as our own*. These values connect us to a larger world ("the needs of others as well as ourselves") and introduce the question of what others are entitled to ask from us and what we are entitled to ask from ourselves ("legitimate expectations").

When you turn to specific ethical questions and debates, keep this definition in mind. To spell out the values involved, ask what needs and legitimate expectations—both your own and others'—are at stake here. For what needs and legitimate expectations are the parties to this debate trying to speak?

Some ethical debates will be new to you, and answering these questions will take some research or exploration—listening carefully to the different sides, asking around. For other debates we can fill in the blanks more easily—we've heard the contending positions already, or can easily figure them out. The point of our definition of moral values, in any case, is to give us the right blanks to fill in. It gives us the right questions to ask.

ATTENDING TO VALUES

Suppose now that you are asking those questions: that you are looking at specific ethical issues and trying to discern the different values involved. You want to figure out the main moral values, not overlooking anything big, and you want to articulate each of them at least a little. This means listening carefully to what people say, making connections to widely understood moral values, even picking up on hints and things unsaid. It takes work! Here are some guidelines for paying attention to moral values in this way.

MORAL VALUES ARE MANY AND VARIED

Just as values vary in general, so do moral values. Our basic needs and legitimate expectations are many and diverse, after all, so we should expect our

moral values to be also. Thus our first guideline is simply to expect—and indeed seek out—a variety of moral values in any issue you consider.

A photo in the newspaper shows a line of Amish buggies stretching along a country road—a funeral procession for a buggy driver killed by a drunk driver. An all-too-familiar story, made more poignant still because the accident we imagine is also a collision—literally—of two radically different cultures. A life of sobriety and devotion (I will underline some of the moral values that come up) cut short too soon. We also remember how much trust we place in each other on the roads: how can people more responsibly live up to it?

State and federal minimum wage standards are being debated again: Should they be raised? It's a matter of basic fairness, advocates say. While incomes at the top are going even farther off into the stratosphere, how can we justify leaving behind other people, at the low end of the wage scale, who are working hard, supporting themselves and their families, and contributing to society? People should be able at least to get by, to have a little leisure, to be able to raise their children in dignity. Many of those struggling to get by on minimum-wage jobs are also single mothers whose only fallback is welfare—or homelessness. Meeting even their basic needs—survival and some degree of independence—requires action.

Opponents worry about losing the social benefits of lower wages, such as more jobs, and about fairness again, this time to employers at the margins. Would raising the minimum wage push some of them out of business? Might it therefore actually reduce the number of jobs available? What does justice ask of us here?

Consider the moral values associated with even (especially!) something as intimate and close to us as sex. Despite the fact that the stereotypical moral view of sex is all too often a simple “No,” this is far too simple even for the most stereotypical situation. Surely the first thing to say is that sex can be a wonderful thing, and arguably essential to happiness in many lives. Pleasure itself is a moral value—we shall soon see that it is the very key to ethics on one influential theory of ethics.

Then of course there is love, which in addition to also being a wonderful state to be in, is a deep mode of connection and commitment as well. Sex, understood as *making* love—a telling phrase—is implicated in many of the central relationships of our lives: marriages and families and communities, part of the joint work of a household and child-raising, part of life companionships that goes far beyond what happens in bed.

Of course there are reasons for caution too. Sex can be an act of profound vulnerability: it calls for trust and trustworthiness. Sex tends to create legitimate expectations for certain kinds of care and solicitude beyond the act itself. Are you ready for that?

How about this value: communication. Sex itself is deeply communicative—far beyond words. But ethics would also have us attend to “communication” in

a more ordinary sense, for instance to just plain talking. Lovers might not want to assume that there is just one sort of thing that sex could be, or that what's happening is understood the same way by both parties. Finding out is not only a form of respect for your potential partner(s); it might just end up deepening your companionship and pleasure too.

Speaking of relationships at the other end of the scale, we have already spoken of concerns for the future of the earth and the well-being of our children as well as justice to future generations as well as to the rest of life on Earth. The "seven generations" idea is one of many expressions of this ideal. Thus we are beginning to rethink our practices and to consider new questions about sustainability. How can we live so as to pass on an Earth in as good (better yet, better) shape as we found it? As we begin to comprehend the fact that we may be altering the very planet as a whole, seemingly so immense and for so long taken for granted, we find that ethics now reaches into the biosphere. What does biospheric good citizenship require?

So: there are four moral issues, broadly speaking—and already more than twenty moral values, including some overlaps (justice, for example, comes up in multiple forms). Many more could be found in each issue too. And that's just a start. Each issue also has its own context—from political and environmental debates to personal responsibility and questions like the nature of the "simple life"—or sometimes several at once. Doing the best by the most people, for instance (as in: what are the overall social effects of raising the minimum wage?). Old ways versus new ways. The place of the earth, as the setting for all of our other values, in ethics itself. And others as well.

LOOK IN DEPTH

Many different values also come up *within* each issue, quite apart from other issues. Call this *depth*.

That Amish funeral again. Most obviously, what's at stake is drunk driving: once again, a severe form of social irresponsibility. Think of what it means to take the wheel of a machine that can maim and kill when you are not fully aware and capable. (Think of what it means even when you *are* fully aware and capable.) Even worse is when you are just a beginning driver.

This photo would not have appeared in the paper had the victim not been Amish. The Amish won the legal right to drive buggies on the roads only after a hard-fought struggle in many states and over many years. Why? They don't care for the conveniences that the rest of us take for granted. Why not? Modern "conveniences," they say, corrupt the simplicity of our relation to each other, the Earth, and God. Without them, the Amish have created and sustained tight-knit, mutually supportive communities and farms that are the finest in their areas. Lately some environmentalists have begun to champion Amish methods on ecological grounds. An Amish world, for one thing, would not have created global climate change! So there is much to think

about here. Can we reclaim some of the virtues the Amish represent without giving up on modern technology? If not, what does that say about how things are with us? If so, why aren't we doing it?

Notice again: all of this complexity arises from thinking about just one photograph—and still we have just scratched the surface. Moral issues like these have histories, and they represent the intersection or manifestation of many different concerns and struggles, many of them still unfolding.

Moral values around sex are—not surprisingly!—deep too. We get crude, maybe, if we reduce sex to nothing but the immediate pleasure or release of tension. But there is much more to sex than this, even if we are thinking mostly in terms of pleasure. Sex involves the many pleasures of companionship and mutual appreciation, of touching and simple physical togetherness, of wonder and grace and humor too. The needs it fulfills are not just passing and physical, but go to the very core of our beings. There's nothing crude about that.

Other moral perspectives on sex go deeper in other ways. Sex can be seen as the desire to unite with another person, to go beyond the limits of our own being and solitude. In this way the religious traditions, especially, tend to understand sex as a fitting completion of our natures, both as animals and as social and spiritual beings. Sex is part of what brings us into caring and community. It transmutes physical desire into loyalty, sharing, family, love. Again, it is not for nothing that we call sex *making* love.

Sexual cautions and limits arise against this very background of moral complexity—out of the very nature of sex itself. They aren't arbitrary moral impositions from somewhere else. For one thing, to unite with another person surely requires seeing them as a *whole* person: body and soul, as it were, together. Sexual acts are physical, in part, usually: but sex is nonetheless a relation between persons, ends in themselves, as the moral philosopher Immanuel Kant puts it (we'll meet him in short order too), not merely means to someone's pleasure. That can be a difficult task in general, and maybe especially in sexual acts.

IT'S NOT ABOUT YOU

Spelling out some of the moral values at stake in some cases may be hard, especially when you disagree with them. Buggy drivers, or drunk drivers, may just make you impatient. And sex?—don't want to talk about it. Maybe not climate change either, for rather different reasons. Or assisted suicide, or gun control, or . . .

But your first job is not to decide what *you* think. Suspend judgment until later. It's wiser to remind ourselves again that we don't know everything there is to know. In particular, if we dismiss some moral values without any kind of exploration or careful attention, we might never know what kinds of depth we missed. To look at a buggy driver as a mere curiosity, or as a hazard

that ought to keep out of your way, misses a lot that is intriguing and maybe even enriching.

So be fair to those who come at ethical issues from other angles and places. Don't rush to judge. Ask what these people are about instead. What are their goals and ideals? What matters to them? What are their needs and expectations? How do they invite us to rethink our own?

At least try to see matters from others' points of view. You're not being asked to decide who is "right" and who is "wrong," or which way we ought finally to choose. The first task is just to figure out the values involved. And that means on all sides. Not just filtered through a moral position you've already taken. Put your own position aside for a moment. Listen first; decide later.

CLARIFY!

Moral values often show up in forms that are not fully spelled out or clear. Part of our job in unpacking moral issues, then, is to do some of the explaining and clarifying ourselves. We may need to make some distinctions.

A little drama from my days parenting young children:

Molly [4 years old]: Ruthie got to use the big markers, and I only got to use the plain ones.

Me: Yup. [to myself: Uh-oh.]

Molly: That's not fair!

Me: Why not?

Molly: Because I should get to use the big ones if Ruthie does!

Me: But the big markers are not washable and you're not quite old enough to remember to keep them off your clothes and the table. As soon as you can keep them just on the paper, you can use them too.

Molly: I can! I can! [sniffle]

Me: Oh, Molly, that's what you said yesterday, and I let you use them, but you ended up with a big orange splot on your shirt. A nonwashable splot!

Is it fair that Molly cannot use the big markers? If so, it is because fairness is not as simple as it looks on its face—because fairness cannot necessarily be measured by immediate equality of results. It's complicated. Fairness asks us to allow each child all that she is capable of, consistent with other needs and limits, including fairness to the parents who have to try to wash markers off clothes or tables, or buy new ones.

It's not so easy to spell out in a way that a 4-year-old can understand. In fact, just for that reason, some other approach to the problem sometimes

may be needed, may even be more fair. Getting bigger washable markers, for example. The point is that this is how it goes, in real-life practice. Pay attention and take seriously the demand for clarification and distinctions.

In fact, fairness is a passion with all of us. Is it fair, for example, to set up a system of preferences for one group over another, even if it only comes into play when qualifications are otherwise equal and/or does not compel any particular choice? Some people argue that it is; others argue that it cannot be. It's the same sort of issue. Would some distinctions help? Can you know until you've tried?

GIVE EMOTION ITS DUE

One last clip from the newspaper. Developers and environmentalists clash over new building along a river that serves as many downstream communities' water supply and feeds major shellfish banks in the sounds off the coast. The river is already stressed by runoff from farms and lawn fertilizers, sewage treatment plants, and so on, though for just that reason the impact of any single new development by itself is not that great.

The civil engineer who works for the developer and presented the case to the City Planning Commission has this to say about his environmentalist counterparts: "We're doing this from a fact standpoint, and they [the environmentalists] are doing this from an emotional standpoint." *We* have facts, he says; *they're* just "emotional." His suggestion, of course, is that they should not be taken seriously. Emotion is supposed to be inappropriate when ethical or political matters come up.

It's not. Being emotional can be entirely appropriate. In fact, it's necessary. Remember, values themselves are things we *care* about. Care is an emotion. It's not *only* an emotion—it rests on facts, perspectives on the world, histories and personal choices, and many other things—but the emotional side, the caring side, is essential as well.

The developers "care" too, of course. They too have values. They want to build houses and roads and malls, creating more choices and ease, and making money while doing it. They're a little annoyed in this case too, if you read between the lines, because they have to work under many more restrictions than they used to and still are being criticized for not doing enough. The suggestion is that this isn't quite fair—and that is a feeling, in part, too.

What *would* be inappropriate is "pure" emotion: having no facts at all, just a "feeling." But clearly this is not true of either side in this debate. The environmentalists in this case have at least as many facts as the developers: facts about the overall state of the river, about alternative uses of the site in question, and so on. Perhaps the developers, sensing they have the Planning Commission on their side, can afford to speak with the appearance of dispassion, while the environmentalists sound more upset or desperate. But this

has nothing to do with who has facts and who doesn't—it has to do with who is being heard.

In short: moral values are partly emotional, just as they are partly fact-based. All moral values, on both (all) sides. Moral emotions are parts of our thinking, parts of our very selves, and by including them we keep ourselves more intact, less fragmented, better able to integrate our selves as well as our values. How many unethical results of ethical deliberation come because we disconnect from our decision-making emotionally, because we unhook deliberation from caring? Do not therefore become maudlin or hysterical; but also do not pretend to be dispassionate and accuse the other side of being uninformed or “emotional.” Both are unhelpful extremes. Just speak carefully, listen sympathetically, and try to give all of the relevant values a voice that is measured, but strong.

FAMILIES OF MORAL VALUES

Ethical philosophy offers another distinctive and distinctively powerful kind of guidance or tool for attending to moral values. In particular, certain moral values can be linked together, sometimes loosely and sometimes tightly, around certain key ideas or central values. They are not just a random collection of unrelated things we care about. There are some unifying threads to our apparently diverse moral values. They fall into *families*.

We have already noticed, for example, that many of our moral values are related to fairness, equality, and justice. Suppose that we group these values together, recognizing and celebrating their commonalities. Then again, many other moral values have to do with personal virtues, like honesty, humility, and self-possession. We could do the same with them, distinguishing them from other types while keeping both in play.

You begin to see the hope: that we might discover that our many and varied moral values actually hang together in more basic categories. There may be resemblances between moral values that can bring some order to the hodgepodge that may strike us at first. We would understand moral values better if we could paint those bigger pictures with confidence and clarity.

Much of the rest of Part II of this book will be a tour of four such families of moral values. Most will be somewhat familiar already, and I am sure, and they will grow on you. Here let us outline them by way of introduction.

THE ETHICS OF THE PERSON

Moral values gathered in the family I will call *The Ethics of the Person*. These spotlight and uphold the special nature and value of persons.

P E R S O N S

The Ethics of the Person affirms that *persons* are special, precious, and have a dignity that demands respect. No one is to be reduced to a mere means to others' ends. Social relations require fairness, justice, and equality. Human and civil rights are essential too: they secure the space in which each person is recognized and can flourish. We explore the values of persons in chapter 5.

Many moral values discussed in the last section illustrate this family. For example, we recognize that “good sex,” in the moral sense, requires treating one’s sexual partner(s) as a whole person, like yourself, not just a body. Or maybe you are just buying a toothbrush at the drugstore; still there is a difference between treating the clerk like a kind of vending machine—mechanically going through the motions, with no eye contact or recognition—and relating to him or her as if they are as real as you are yourself. Or perhaps *you* are the clerk. *There’s somebody in there!* Some of us are beginning to wonder if this isn’t true of many other animals as well.

In the last section I spoke of the debate over the minimum wage. Some of this debate involves values in the Ethics of the Person too. It seems unfair or unjust that some people are paid hundreds of times more than other people when all are devoting themselves (or not) with roughly equivalent time and energy and making genuine contributions to a shared enterprise. It does not follow that wages have to be exactly the same, but at some level of inequality, arguably, equality is offended.

Then again, there are rights too: to the fruits of one’s labor, which in the present system usually means wages. Does this mean that whatever inequalities might result could be ethical after all? Notice that this is a question *within* the Ethics of the Person, since both considerations of fairness and of rights flow from respect for persons. (Yes, there can be disagreements within a family of values. Just like feuding family members, the values involved are still related, though maybe they wish they weren’t!) Can this question also be answered within that family? We shall have to see!

THE ETHICS OF HAPPINESS

A second key family of moral values is very different. In the tradition, it has gone by many names; here I will call it *The Ethics of Happiness*. Moral values gathered here spotlight and uphold the values of well-being, satisfaction, and pleasure.

H A P P I N E S S

The Ethics of Happiness challenges us to achieve the greatest balance of happiness (well-being, satisfaction, pleasure) over suffering. Include in the great calculation the happiness of others as well as oneself, and we find ourselves looking to achieve the greatest balance of happiness over suffering in society as a whole. Ethical thinking in this family of values is quantitative and economic, concerned with trade-offs and the distribution of goods, maximizing tangible social benefits. We explore this family of values in chapter 6.

At bottom, surely, pleasure is why we so value physical satisfactions like being well fed and comfortably housed and gratified in our personal and social relations. At least, when we or other people are *not* well fed or well housed or able to sustain a life of companionship or love, we are *unhappy* in a way that is morally bad. Misery ought to be reduced or minimized—mine *and* yours. And of course, when we can, we ought to “accentuate the positive.”

So, for example, when we argue that raising the minimum wage will make people happier in general—low-paid workers a little less pressed, a little better able to provide for themselves and their children—we are appealing to a standard something like the familiar “greatest happiness of the greatest number.” Notice that this is a very different argument than the arguments about fairness or rights just considered from the Ethics of Persons (which could apply too—but these are still considerations from a different family of moral values).

Of course, valuing pleasure does not mean indulging any desire that comes along. Over-indulgence will make you less happy, overall, in the long term—probably in the near term too. On the other hand, on this view, the dangers of over-indulgence do not mean that pleasure as such is morally bad. Rather, the challenge is just to be strategic about pleasure. Moderate your indulgence; know when to stop for the sake of your own overall good.

This is why ethical thinking in the Ethics of Happiness often is quantitative and economic: it’s a question of balance and strategy. Similarly, on the social level, the aim is to figure out policies that do well for as many people as possible without creating major losses for others or unpleasant long-term disadvantages. In this way the Ethics of Happiness could apply to everything from how we might spend an evening with our friends to, say, how to run a business or a farm or even a world. *Make everyone as happy as possible!*—what could be more natural or obvious or beneficent than that?

THE ETHICS OF VIRTUE

Values gathered in *The Ethics of Virtue* spotlight and uphold the traits and dispositions that constitute moral character.

V I R T U E

The Ethics of Virtue encompasses those moral values concerned with *character*: with traits like self-discipline, responsibility, honesty, charity, loyalty, devotion. Classical Western antiquity traditionally identified four “cardinal” or “natural” virtues of justice, temperance, prudence, and courage. The Christian tradition added the three “theological” virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Classical Eastern traditions highlight virtues such as tranquility, non-attachment, compassion, right livelihood, and nonviolence. We explore these and many other virtues in chapter 7.

In the last section we spoke, for example, of the virtues of sobriety and devotion, and of simplicity; also of carefulness for the earth. The Dalai Lama calls *kindness* his religion. His admirers connect the virtue of kindness in turn to other character traits such as love, generosity, and joyfulness—virtues too. In personal relations, we spoke of such virtues as trustworthiness, care, and responsibility. And love, of course, or what the Dalai Lama as well as Jesus called lovingkindness.

Consider the work ethic. Broadly speaking, it affirms the significance of work as a means to the social good (invoking the Ethics of Happiness) or to godliness (on an older view), but in actual practice the work ethic is a very specific set of virtues—again, distinctive character traits valued in society as well as sought after by employers—such as initiative, hard work, cooperativeness, responsibility (again), effort, and diligence. All of these traits have a moral dimension, though it is also true that today the work ethic, at least in its traditional forms, is being questioned, in part for moral reasons as well, usually from one of the other families, such as the Ethics of Happiness (does a preoccupation with work really make us happy in the end?) or the Ethics of Relationship. Inside the virtue family, it may also be in tension with certain other virtues such as simplicity, balance, and non-competitiveness.

Indeed, almost any specific field of endeavor requires certain specific virtues—moral or not. This is why we can speak of good pirates or good arsonists as well as good citizens or good parents. Certain character traits serve the purpose at hand. This is also why most professions today have codes of ethics, rules for what ethical practice requires in that profession: honesty and persistence from reporters, for example, and confidentiality and attentive skill from doctors. These are virtues with moral dimensions as well, and they flow from the specific nature of the profession or craft. Oh—and surely the role of *student* has virtues too, right?

THE ETHICS OF RELATIONSHIP

The moral values gathered in *The Ethics of Relationship* spotlight and uphold our connections and deep interlinking with others around us and over time, all of which lead to certain responsibilities too.

R E L A T I O N S H I P

The Ethics of Relationship encompasses those moral values concerned with our connections to others, from families to larger human communities. We are social beings as well as individuals: we grow up in families, take on traditions and heritages, and live within and depend upon human and also ecological communities. Recognizing how deeply our many communities make us who we are calls forth not only gratefulness but also a responsibility to care for and participate in them. We explore these values in chapter 8.

We are in relationship at many levels, from the most intimate—as in sexual relationships with one or a few other contemporaries—out to multiple generations, and indeed with the earth itself. We spoke of both ends of this scale when considering how many and how varied our moral values actually are.

Close to us, family relationships and intimate partnerships engage us with the basic needs and legitimate expectations of others as well as ourselves. More widely, human communities do the same. We can see it clearly in tight-knit communities such as the Amish where mutual care and constant joint effort are the norm. Amish farmer David Kline reports in his classic book *Great Possessions* that a visitor once asked him what he would do if his barn burned down. Most regular farmers buy insurance to pay for rebuilding in such a case. Kline replied by sweeping the horizon of neighboring farms with his hand and saying, “*they’re* my insurance.” He knew that the whole community would come and barn-raise for him, just as he would for others in need. That’s the ethics of relationship in action.

Still wider are our relationships with others across the generations. Thus one of the earliest examples of a moral value in this book came to us from the Ethics of Relationship: we spoke of the Great Law of the Iroquois, remember, which asks us to consider not just what we have, and those around us, but also our descendants out to the seventh generation. We also read the seven-generations idea as locating us not at the beginning but in the *middle* of seven generations. “Remember who you are!” native people say: part of a greater flow of forebears and heirs.

Moreover, as the Iroquois also would have it, “All our relations” arguably include the other-than-human beings and the earth itself. They too in some

sense are “relatives,” and we are obliged to consider them as such. But if the earth and its many other-than-human beings are also truly part of our web of relationships, then a great many other values and practices may have to change. You could think of this as another debate between families of values. The Ethics of Relationship is both a very old category of moral values and also, today, a resurgent and challenging new one.

NOTES ON THE FAMILIES

Again, these families of moral values will be much elaborated in the rest of the chapters in Part II. We can conclude this introduction by briefly taking up a few basic questions that may arise about the families and the related ideas introduced so far.

USES OF THE FAMILIES

Remember: the overall aim of thinking with families of moral values is to organize moral values in a way that makes them more approachable and understandable. They have some order; they are not just a random and varied collection of specific values, all over the map, but come together in coherent ways, in familiar and distinct categories. To take that “map” analogy seriously, we could say that the categories just laid out—the four main families of moral values—are a fairly good map of the territory of moral values. As with any good map, you can move around with it, it will tell you “where you are,” and when you stand back and look at the whole, you get a sense of how specific parts or regions (here, of moral values) relate to each other.

The families have other and related uses. One is to focus key questions. Especially when a moral debate falls primarily within one family of values, we may be able to identify key questions quite finely. For example, as we shall see, in the Ethics of the Person, the exact nature of “persons” is such a key question. What is personhood? When do we gain it? This bears on the abortion question. Similarly, when do we lose it? This bears on the assisted suicide and euthanasia questions. And must either transition be drastic, all at once, or can it be gradual? None of these is an easy question in any way, of course, but at least these questions are specific and approachable, and empirical evidence—for example, what we know or can find out about brain function—can be drawn upon.

Having read chapter 2, you’ll be happy to hear that the families of moral values can also prompt us toward new—though hard—ethical thinking. For example, could it not be the case that other animals, or at least some of them, are “persons” too? Many other animals are much more developed and self-aware than human fetuses, after all—certainly than fetuses in early months of pregnancy. Indeed, many other animals are at least as developed

and aware as human children. If we define personhood partly by degree of development or self-awareness, then, we may end up having to extend certain rights to other animals along with human fetuses and children, or even to some other animals and human children but *not* to fetuses. These may (or may not) strike you as odd possibilities, but the question, all the same, is a logical consequence of the path that the Ethics of Persons starts us along. Now we are invited—even required—to figure out where that path leads.

Or again: animals have pleasures and pains too, and unfortunately some of their most extraordinary pains are inflicted by us. Why shouldn't the Ethics of Happiness apply to them too? Especially when their pain so dramatically exceeds our gains, mightn't it be time to make some changes?

Finally, remembering the families of moral values also helps us remember that the moral values involved in most debates are indeed, as our guideline says, many and varied. If you are considering some moral issue, then, you can use the families to ask yourself what you (or the debate) may be overlooking. Perhaps they need more attention. For example, we have discussed the question of the minimum wage as mostly a debate within the Ethics of Persons, or between the Ethics of Persons and the Ethics of Happiness. But what might the Ethics of Relationship have to say about it? Or again, what might an Ethics of Virtue have to say about ethics and other animals? Good questions! The families help—indeed, insist—that we remember to ask them.

LIMITS AND CHALLENGES

In general, not surprisingly, the chief *limit* of any of the families, considered by itself, is simply that it is not the whole story. Each family necessarily spotlights certain types of moral values—that is its job—but therefore also leaves others more or less in the dark. Some care and regular reminders are therefore needed to keep the full picture in view.

Spotlighting is not a problem as long as we remember that the families *are* partial in this way, not meant to illuminate the whole stage. In practice, though, it happens that advocates within one family, or people whose moral work or practice engages them mostly with one family of moral values, can forget that there is more to the story. Sometimes we may be surprised or even annoyed when other types of moral values start showing up, especially if they pull in unexpected or alternative directions. Here the other families are useful as reminders of what else is also likely at stake. Each of chapters 5 through 8 therefore concludes with a brief and basically friendly reminder of just this sort.

Then again, though, not everyone totally committed to one family of values may agree that their favorite types of moral values really are limited or partial. Sometimes it has been argued instead that one family or another has special place: that values of that family are more important than values

in the other families, that they “override” or have priority over values from other families if things come to a head. Another line of argument sometimes heard is that really the values of one family incorporate the values from all the others (or the *valid* values from all the others: some values are usually ruled out of court by this move). Often, as we will see, this kind of argument is made for the Ethics of Happiness: that most values in the other families really serve happiness in the end, though perhaps indirectly or only “as a rule”—and that those that don’t simply don’t count.

At the end of the chapters to come in Part II, then, we will also briefly consider certain arguments for the priority or completeness of the family in question. You can see that this brings us into more contentious territory. I will try to lay the arguments out fairly, but you will find that these discussions are somewhat less friendly. Though there is a definite attraction to the idea that all moral values may form a single, tightly unified system, no such proposed system has so far been widely persuasive to philosophers.

On the contrary, in fact: not only is there no particular reason why moral values should hang together very tightly, but many philosophers are persuaded that it is unlikely. This is chiefly because moral values have varied sources. We have basic needs and legitimate expectations of many and quite different sorts, arising in a variety of ways: some rooted in our biology; some in our social relations; some in complex and particular histories, like the very particular cultural settings that shape different conceptions of virtue (consider, say, Chinese versus Greek lists of virtues). This is why we are often so morally divided in the first place!

Of course, there *might* be a single, unified system that is correct all the same. In the absence of any clear consensus, though, it is surely wiser to stick to the more varied and complex “map” of values just outlined, in which moral values show up in more than one flavor and more than one distinct family. This is the best approach for a textbook, for sure. Even if some family really does turn out to comprehend or have priority over others, at least on the theories of philosophers, our moral tradition at present considers them distinct, which is also the way we learn them. We will proceed in more familiar terms.

Finally, the “Complications” sections concluding chapters 5 through 8 will also consider—again, very briefly—certain other intriguing and contemporary problems and issues within each family of values. The idea is not to somehow reject the whole family of values, but only to indicate some of the places where it has had difficulties and objections have persistently come up—points of which you need to be aware.

Overall, then, you should leave each chapter with both a healthy respect for the importance of each family of values, and a healthy respect for each family’s limits and its distinctive and sometimes unwelcome baggage. Once again like actual families, we can’t exactly live with them (they have their own struggles and confinements) but we can’t exactly live without them either!

DO ALL MORAL VALUES HAVE A FAMILY?

One last question is: Do all moral values have a family? Most do, yes. But a few don't, or anyway *may* not—and there is not necessarily any reason that they must. At least at this point in our inquiry, the families of values are simply a means of categorizing them, and it would not be surprising, given all their complexity and change, that not every value fits. For one, perhaps there are newly emerging kinds of values. Human society has rarely, if ever, changed as rapidly as it has in the last hundred years or so, and yet all of the families of moral values we will consider come to us from long before the 20th century. Certainly some new values have arisen that fit the old categories: new virtues, for example, like maybe tolerance. But mightn't some new *categories* be arising as well?

Moreover, there might also be long-standing types of values not so visible to the moralists and philosophers who have devoted themselves to the sorts of values we have considered so far. Some feminist and environmental philosophers in the Ethics of Relationship argue that precisely this has happened with the Ethics of Relationship itself: the whole category has often been rendered invisible. Now, thankfully, it is coming back into view. But perhaps, once again, there may be other categories also pushed to the side and obscured in recent times that also need to be brought back into the light.

A few moral values, on the other hand, may fit into more than one family. Justice, as we saw in the first part of this chapter, shows up in two—under the values of the person and as a virtue—though in somewhat different senses. You could argue that virtues like loyalty, solidarity, and sensitivity also fit in the relationship family. So the lines between categories are not hard and fast.

Still, on the whole, these four families of values give us a useful way to begin to organize the field of moral values and to sort out ethical issues and debates. Keep the questions just raised in mind—we'll come back to them (for example in **Going Farther #10**, “Values on the Edge?”)—but for now, let's put the families of values into our ethical toolbox and look ahead.

**FOR REVIEW**

1. What are values?
2. How are moral values distinct from other kinds of values?
3. What are this chapter's general guidelines for attending to the moral values at stake in a specific issue?
4. Explain: “Look in depth.”
5. Explain: “Give emotion its due.”
6. Pick a moral issue not discussed in this chapter and identify the main moral values involved in it.

7. What makes a family of moral values?
8. What are the four families of moral values identified in this chapter?
9. How are they distinct?
10. Apply one moral value from each of the four families to the question of communication in sexual relationships.
11. Apply one moral value from each of the four families to the question of the minimum wage.
12. What are some of the uses and limits of the families of moral values?



FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

4.1 FOR REFLECTION

What values are most important to you? Not just moral values, first of all, but *any* values. What is it that you care most deeply about? Love? Money? Satisfying and productive work? One or two things, or a great many? Things easily described in a few words, or things that take a long story to explain?

Now turn to *moral* values. What moral values are most important to you? Respect? The greatest happiness (your own *and* others')? Keeping your word? Care and community? Fairness? Are there one or two things, or a great many? Things easily described in a few words, or things that take a long story to explain? Are most of your key values in one specific family? Which one, and why?

Think of a time when you felt proud of yourself. What were you proud of having done (or not done) or of being (or not being)? Then think of some time when you felt angry at yourself. What were you angry about? Why? What values are called upon when you make these judgments? How many of these are moral values?

4.2 ISSUES

Here are some issues to explore with an eye for the values in play—and other relevant values that perhaps *ought* to be in play!

- What moral values (if any) are involved in driving (besides not driving drunk)? Does ethics have anything to say about following speed limits, keeping your insurance up to date, keeping the car well-maintained, and so on? (Clearly there are values involved; the question is whether you consider them *moral* values, and why or why not.) What about radar detectors? Moral, nonmoral, immoral? Why? What families of values are involved?

- What moral obligations do you have toward your parents? Why? Are they (and if so *why* are they) different from the moral obligations your parents have toward you? If there is a difference, is the difference fair? Or does the value of fairness just not apply here?
- Should academic honor codes require students to turn in fellow students who cheated on an exam? What families of values have something to say about this? What do they say?
- Some of us expect that U.S. presidents will be sterling personal role models. Others ask: isn't it enough if they do what they can to improve the quality of life, the economy, world politics, and so on? What values, again, are invoked here? Do the same expectations apply to other leaders, for example, corporate CEOs, movie stars, athletes? Why or why not? What moral values shape these expectations?
- Many businesses now have codes of ethics. What kinds of moral values would, or should, such a code include? Also: could there be a debate about this? That is, might it be that a business code of ethics should only concern certain kinds of moral values and not others? Must business serve the social good, for example, or should businesspeople be judged only by their personal virtuousness?
- Rights of accused (and convicted) criminals (to fair trials, against cruel and unusual punishments, etc.) versus the social good (*what* good[s], exactly?) that might be achieved by rapid trials, limited appeals, and cheap jails. What families of moral values are most directly invoked here? Are there other moral values also in play?
- How should the government respond to the demands of dispossessed Indian tribes for some kind of compensation or return of ancient ancestral lands? Is this an *ethical* issue? What kinds of options can be morally considered? How does this issue relate to the question of reparations for slavery?
- Population policy: What kinds of moral values are at stake as we think about having children and about religious or political policies that affect family choices and reproduction rates, at home or abroad?

4.3 READING VALUES STATEMENTS AND STORIES

Look at the mission statements of a variety of organizations: local business, big corporations, nonprofit organizations, groups like Amnesty International or the Sierra Club or the National Rifle Association (NRA) or the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Nearly all of these can be found on the Web: the research is easy. Be sure to pick some you dislike as well as some you like.

Once again, spell out the moral values involved. What kinds of values tend to show up? Typically in what families? Many of these organizations we only know through a few media stereotypes, or perhaps because they are very

visible on one or two controversial issues. Don't assume that you already know who and what they are and that you don't need to look carefully at what they themselves say they are. Every organization on this list will surprise you if you look closely enough.

Look at your own college or university catalog. The first pages usually offer some larger sense of the institution's mission, often in moral terms. Again, what kinds of values tend to show up? Typically in what families? Would it be the same for educational institutions of other sorts—like military academies, Zen monasteries, museums, auto-mechanic training schools? Find out.

Political speeches and party platforms are a good place to look as well. (Full texts can sometimes be found in newspapers like *The New York Times*, or on the Web.) Don't forget the United Nations—look at its founding documents, like the UN Declaration of Human Rights. Look at the speeches of ambassadors from places you don't like. For those with a historical bent, look to the great documents and speeches of American history. Look at the encyclicals of the popes.

If your interests run in a more literary direction, look at popular stories in the same way. Children's stories, for example. They often clearly promote moral values and in fact invite us to spell them out as we interpret the story—as we find the “moral.” Useful collections are William Bennett's *The Book of Virtues* (Simon and Schuster, 1993) and his follow-up *The Moral Compass* (Simon and Schuster, 1995).

4.4 MAPPING ETHICAL DEBATES

The last section of this chapter briefly mentions that the families of moral values can be used to map ethical debates. You might take this seriously enough to actually work out maps of various ethical debates.

Try this one. In 2005, amid great controversy, the state of North Carolina enacted a state lottery, ostensibly to raise more money for the schools. That would be a clear social benefit—better education—so you could argue that the lottery should have the support of the Ethics of Happiness. On the other hand, lotteries are forms of gambling, and therefore play to our vices, after all—the opposite of virtues—such as greed, impulsiveness, and irresponsibility. So while happiness might say yes, the Ethics of Virtue emphatically says no.

Your “map” might at first be quite simple. You could just list pro and con moral considerations about state lotteries in separate boxes, for example. But then things get more complex. For example, as the text points out, one use of the families of moral value is to remind us that many different moral values may be at stake, and to give us a specific way to seek them out: we should ask about families of values that have not yet been heard from. What might the Ethics of the Person, for example, say about lotteries? Rights are relevant: our presumption usually is that we have a right to do anything that is not harmful to others. But gambling, if it harms anyone, only harms ourselves (or so it

might be argued). So, on this view, a state lottery is certainly morally allowable. Another family weighs in.

Thinking farther with the Ethics of Persons, though, there are complications. Justice turns out to be relevant too. Since poorer people are the main target of lottery ticket sales, it is sometimes argued that the lottery really just amounts to another tax on the people who can least afford it. Aren't they therefore being used as means to other people's ends? Thus the Ethics of Persons may actually be divided on this question.

The Ethics of Relationship might add that it is a tax not just on their money but, as it were, on poor people's hopes. But shouldn't the state (the political community) be offering people *real* hopes rather than false ones?

Even the Ethics of Happiness comes back with more. Gambling can also make people quite *unhappy*, depriving them of resources they could use in much better ways, and can even become an addiction. So although a state lottery may be good for some people's education, it may also be bad for other people's emotional and financial well-being. Which is greater? This would be an empirical question, in part, and perhaps not so clear—best to note it.

Mapping out all this requires something a bit more complex. Try a chart. Give each of the four families a column, and each option—in this case just “pro” and con”—a line. Our rough sketch of the lottery debate, then, might look like this:

	Ethics of Persons	Ethics of Happiness	Ethics of Virtue	Ethics of Relationship
Pro- lottery	Rights to gamble as you please	Funding schools serves the social good	?	?
Con- lottery	Justice: wrong to exploit the poor even if it is for schools	People forfeit resources they could better use other ways; plus gambling can become an addiction.	Gambling encourages vices like greed, impulsiveness, irresponsibility	State (political community) should offer real hope, not exploit people's gullibility

I might just add that in the actual debate, as well as in the Senate whose dramatic vote (staged when a few opponents were known to be unable to attend) finally established the lottery, it was opposed both by most conservative senators, primarily because it encouraged the vice of gambling, and by progressives, who objected to it because of its predictable injustice to the poor. Proponents put funding the schools as their first priority. So our little chart actually is also a map of how the debate fell out.

Notice that not all families have values both pro and con on this issue (as far as I can tell). It is always useful to at least ask after them, but don't expect always to have an answer. In fact, on some issues, some families of moral values may be entirely silent—offering neither pros *nor* cons. Sometimes a whole debate may be a disagreement between one moral value in one family on one side and one moral value from another family on the other. Other times a debate may be entirely within a single family.

Try your own maps or charts for other ethical debates. Again, remember, these are just maps: they don't tell us, as it were, where to go. You are just trying to sort out and understand the debates, but this does not necessarily make resolving them any easier. It may well make them harder! Still, part of the point of ethics is that moral issues *are* in fact complex—more involved and many-sided than we often think in the midst of debate about them, when things can get too simplified. More is at stake, and often enough there are genuine moral values on both (all) sides. Ultimately we can only resolve them if we begin by recognizing their complexity and depth.

NOTES

Many disciplines study values (in general). The aim may be to classify values, to relate them to each other and to other factors, or sometimes to begin to systematically evaluate them as well. For a useful survey of social-scientific approaches to the question of the nature of values, as well as a survey of typologies and developmental theories of value, see Richard Kilby, *The Study of Human Values* (University Press of America, 1993). A stimulating and accessible look at values that goes back to the very beginning (how do we know values are even *real*?) is Howard Richards, *Life on a Small Planet: A Philosophy of Value* (Philosophical Library, 1966). For the classic introduction to the philosophical theory of values, see Risieri Frondizi, *What Is Value?* (Open Court Library of Philosophy, 1963). Classic but more difficult sources are John Dewey, *Theory of Valuation* (University of Chicago Press, 1939) and G. H. von Wright, *The Varieties of Goodness* (Humanities Press, 1963).

For more on Amish farming, see David Kline's *Great Possessions: An Amish Farmer's Journal* (Wooster Book Company, 2001).



GOING FARTHER #4

AN ABORTION STORY

The minute the abortion issue is mentioned, alas, too many people assume that they've heard it all already—and it's true, we've heard the same few things many, many times—or that the “other side” (whichever it is) has nothing worth listening to anyway. But the story that follows is in fact a deep and suggestive story, as well as very intimate and painful. Actually, there *is* more to hear.

I first encountered it in a collection of stories intended to illustrate “how varied, complex, and personal are the factors surrounding reproductive choice, and . . . the suffering that results when choice is denied.” (The book was Angela Bonavoglia, ed., *The Choices We Made*, Random House, 1991.) If you are single-mindedly looking to classify it as pro-life or pro-choice, you'd probably conclude from the last phrase that this story has a pro-choice “moral.” But it would be wiser to suspend judgment on that question and pay more attention to the first phrase: *how varied, complex, and personal are the factors surrounding reproductive choice*.

Try reading the story just for that. Note both the overwhelming importance of life to Rayna Rapp, and her partner and her parents too, and their conviction, nonetheless, that choice—abortion in this case—is necessary too. How is this possible? Note too all of the ways in which social factors beyond their control—especially the lack of “decent humane attention and services for other-than-fully-abled children and adults”—also seem to compel that choice. Does this suggest some other ways of thinking about ethics and abortion?

Of course, one can argue with this too. Still, for purposes of paying attention, just try to listen carefully. You do not have to agree, or even worry about whether you agree or not. Your results may be surprising. Is it just possible that this story, tragic as it is, helps to show us a way out—beyond the current opposition of “life” versus “choice”?

READING 7

“XYLO”

RAYNA RAPP

RAYNA RAPP teaches anthropology at New York University, studying many of the themes embodied in her story: the intersection of gender and disability issues, technological change, and culture in reproductive decisions. “XYLO” originally

Rayna Rapp, “XYLO.” Reproduced by permission of Rayna Rapp.

appeared in the early 1980s and has been widely republished (and in some quarters denounced) since then. In 1999 Rapp followed it with a book-length examination of (as she puts it) “the social impact of amniocentesis in America,” *Testing Women, Testing the Fetus* (Routledge). For contrasting choices in a strikingly parallel situation, see Martha Beck, *Expecting Adam* (Harmony, 2011).

Mike called the fetus XYLO, XY for its unknown sex, LO for the love we were pouring into it. Day by day we fantasized about who this growing cluster of cells might become. Day by day, we followed the growth process in the myriad books that surround modern pregnancy for the over-thirty-five baby boomlet. Both busy with engrossing work and political commitments, we welcomed this potential child with excitement, fantasy and the rationality of scientific knowledge. As a Women’s Movement activist, I had decided opinions about treating pregnancy as a normal, not a diseased condition, and we were fortunate to find a health-care team—obstetrician, midwives, genetic counseling—who shared that view.

The early months of the pregnancy passed in a blur of exhaustion and nausea. Preoccupied with my own feeling, I lived in a perpetual underwater, slow-motion version of my prior life. As one friend put it, I was already operating on fetal time, tied to unfamiliar regimen of enforced naps, loss of energy, and rigid eating. Knowing the research on nutrition, on hormones, and on miscarriage rates among older pregnant women, I did whatever I could to stay comfortable.

I was thirty-six when XYLO was conceived, and like many of my peers, I chose to have amniocentesis, a prenatal test for birth defects such as Down syndrome, Tay-Sachs disease, and sickle-cell anemia. Both Mike and I knew about prenatal diagnosis from our friends’ experiences, and from reading about it. Each year, many thousands of American women choose amniocentesis to detect birth defects. The procedure is performed between the sixteenth and twentieth weeks of pregnancy. Most obstetricians, mine included, send their pregnant patients directly to the genetic division of a hospital where counseling is provided, and the laboratory technicians are specially trained. Analysis of amniotic fluid requires complex laboratory work, and can cost between five hundred dollars and two thousand dollars.

It was fear of Down syndrome that sent us to seek prenatal diagnosis of XYLO. Down syndrome produces a characteristic physical appearance—short, stocky size, large tongue, puffy upward-slanting eyes with skin folds in the inner corners—and is

a major cause of mental retardation, worldwide. People with Down syndrome are quite likely to have weak cardiovascular systems, respiratory problems, and run a greater risk of developing childhood leukemia. While the majority of Down syndrome infants used to die very young, a combination of antibiotics and infant surgery enables modern medicine to keep them alive. And programs of childhood physical-mental stimulation may facilitate their assimilation. Some parents also opt for cosmetic surgery—an expensive and potentially risky procedure. Down syndrome is caused by an extra chromosome, at the twenty-first pair of chromosomes, as geneticists label them. And while the diagnosis of Down spells mental retardation and physical vulnerability, no geneticist can tell you how seriously affected your particular fetus will be. There is no cure for Down syndrome. A pregnant woman whose fetus is diagnosed as having the extra chromosome can either prepare to raise a mentally retarded and physically vulnerable child, or decide to abort it.

On the February morning Mike and I arrived at a local medical center for genetic counseling, in my nineteenth week of pregnancy, Nancy Z., our counselor, took a detailed pedigree (or family tree) from each of us, to discover any rare diseases or birth defects for which we could be tested. She then gave us an excellent genetics lesson, explained the amniocentesis procedure and the risks, both of the test and of discovering a serious genetic defect. One third of one percent of pregnancies miscarry due to amniocentesis. Most women feel fine after the test, but some (perhaps 10 percent) experience uterine cramping or contractions. Overall, about 98 percent of the women who go for amniocentesis will be told that no fetal defects or anomalies have been found.

After counseling, we descended to the testing area, where an all-female team of radiologist, obstetrician, nurses, and staff assistants performed the tap. In skilled hands, and with the use of sonogram equipment, the tap is a rapid procedure. I spent perhaps five minutes on the table, belly attached to sonar electrodes, Mike holding my feet for encouragement. The radiologist snapped Polaroid pictures of XYLO, and we had our first “baby album”—gray blotches of a head and spine of our baby-in-waiting. She located the placenta, which enabled the obstetrician to successfully draw a small, clear sample of amniotic fluid (less than one eighth of a cup). The tap felt like a crampier version of drawing blood—not particularly painful or traumatic. We marched the fluid back to the genetic lab where it would be cultured, and went home.

The waiting period for amniocentesis results is a long one, and I was very anxious. Cells must be cultured, then analyzed,

a process that takes two to four weeks. We wait, caught between the late date at which amniocentesis can be performed (usually sixteen to twenty weeks); the moment of quickening, when the woman feels the fetus move (roughly eighteen to twenty weeks); and the legal limits of abortion (very few of which are performed after twenty-four weeks in the United States). Those of my friends who have had amniocentesis report terrible fantasies, dreams, and crying fits, and I was no exception: I dreamed in lurid detail of my return to the lab, of awful damage. I woke up frantic, sobbing, to face the nagging fear that is focused in the waiting period after amniocentesis.

For the 98 percent of women whose amniotic fluid reveals no anomaly, reassurance arrives by phone, or more likely, by mail, confirming a negative test. When Nancy called me twelve days after the tap, I began to scream as soon as I recognized her voice; in her office, I knew only positive results (very negative results, from a potential parent's point of view) are reported by phone. The image of myself, alone, screaming into a white plastic telephone is indelible. Although it only took twenty minutes to locate Mike and bring him and a close friend to my side, time is suspended in my memory. I replay the call, and my screams echo for indefinite periods. We learned, after contacting our midwives and obstetrician, that a diagnosis of a male fetus with Down syndrome had been made. Our fantasies for XYLO, our five months' fetus, were completely shattered.

Mike and I had discussed what we would do if amniocentesis revealed a serious genetic condition long before the test. For us, the diagnosis of Down syndrome was reason to choose abortion. Our thinking was clear, if abstract, long before the question became reality. We were eager to have a child, and prepared to change our lives to make emotional, social, and economic resources available. But the realities of raising a child who could never grow to independence would call forth more than we could muster, unless one or both of us gave up our work, our political commitments, our social existence beyond the household. And despite a shared commitment to coparenting, we both understood that in this society, that one was likely to be the mother. When I thought about myself, I knew that in such a situation, I would transform myself to become the kind of twenty-four-hour-a-day advocate such a child would require. I'd do the best and most loving job I could, and I'd undoubtedly become an activist in support of the needs of disabled children.

But other stark realities confronted us: to keep a Down syndrome child alive through potentially lethal health problems is an

act of love with weighty consequences. As we ourselves age, to whom would we leave the person XYLO would become? Neither Mike nor I have any living kin who are likely to be young enough, or close enough, to take on this burden after our deaths. In a society where the state provides virtually no decent, humane services for the mentally retarded, how could we take responsibility for the future of our dependent Down syndrome child? In good conscience, we couldn't choose to raise a child who would become a ward of the state. The health care, schools, various therapies that Down syndrome children require are inadequately available, and horrendously expensive in America; no single family should have to shoulder all the burdens that a decent health and social policy may someday extend to physically and mentally disabled people. In the meantime, while struggling for such a society, we did not choose to bring a child into this world who could never grow up to care for himself.

Most women who've opted for amniocentesis are prepared to face the question of abortion, and many of us *do* choose it, after a diagnosis of serious disability is made. Perhaps 95 percent of Down syndrome pregnancies are terminated after test results are known. Reports on other diseases and conditions are harder to find, but in one study, the diagnosis of spina bifida led to abortion about 90 percent of the time.

In shock and grief, I learned from my obstetrician that two kinds of late second-trimester abortions were available. Most common are the "installation procedures"—saline solution or urea is injected into the uterus to kill the fetus, and drugs are sometimes used to bring on labor. The woman then goes through labor to deliver the fetus. The second kind of midtrimester abortion, and the one I choose, is a D&E—dilation and evacuation. This procedure demands more active intervention from a doctor, who vacuums out the amniotic fluid, and then removes the fetus. The D&E requires some intense, upsetting work for the medical team, but it's over in about twenty minutes, without putting the woman through labor. Both forms of late abortion entail some physical risk, and the psychological pain is enormous. Deciding to end the life of a fetus you've wanted and carried for most of five months is no easy matter. The number of relatively late second-trimester abortions performed for genetic reasons is very small. It seems an almost inconsequential number, unless you happen to be one of them.

Making the medical arrangements, going back for counseling, the pretests, and finally, the abortion, was the most difficult period of my adult life. I was then twenty-one weeks pregnant, and had been proudly carrying my expanding belly. Telling everyone—friends, family, students, colleagues, neighbors—seemed an endless

nightmare. But it also allowed us to rely on their love and support during this terrible time. Friends streamed in from all over to teach my classes; I have scores of letters expressing concern; the phone never stopped ringing for weeks. Our community was invaluable, reminding us that our lives were rich and filled with love despite this loss. A few weeks afterward, I spoke with another woman who'd gone through selective abortion (as this experience is antiseptically called in medical jargon). She'd returned to work immediately, her terrible abortion experience unspoken. Colleagues assumed she'd had a late miscarriage, and didn't speak about it. Her isolation only underlined my appreciation of the support I'd received.

My parents flew a thousand miles to sit guard over my hospital bed, answer telephones, shop, and cook. Filled with sorrow for the loss of their first grandchild, my mother told me of a conversation she'd had with my father. Despite their grief, they were deeply grateful for the test. After all, she reasoned, we were too young and active to be devastated like this; if the child had been born, she and my dad would have taken him to raise in their older years, so we could get on with raising other children. I can only respond with deep love and gratitude for the wellspring of compassion behind that conversation. But surely, no single woman, mother or grandmother, no single family, nuclear or extended, should have to bear all the burdens that raising a seriously disabled child entails. It points out, once again, the importance of providing decent, humane attention and services for other-than-fully-abled children and adults.

And, of course, parents of disabled children are quick to point out that the lives they've nurtured have been worth living. I honor their hard work and commitments, as well as their love, and I think that part of "informed consent" to amniocentesis and selective abortion should include information about parents' groups of Down syndrome children, and social services available to them, not just the individual, medical diagnosis of the problem. And even people who feel they could never choose a late abortion may nonetheless want amniocentesis so they'll have a few extra months to prepare themselves, other family members, friends, and special resources for the birth of a child with special, complex needs.

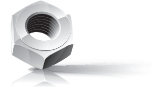
Recovering from the abortion took a long time. Friends, family, coworkers, students did everything they could to ease me through the experience. Even so, I yearned to talk with someone who'd "been there." Over the next few months, I used my personal and medical networks to locate and talk with a handful of other women who'd opted for selective abortions. In each case, I was the first person they'd ever met with a similar experience. The isolation of this decision and its consequences is intense.

Only when women (and concerned men) speak of the experience of selective abortion as a tragic but chosen fetal death can we as a community offer the support, sort out the ethics, and give the compassionate attention that such a loss entails.

For two weeks, Mike and I breathed as one person. His distress, loss, and concern were never one whit less than my own. But we were sometimes upset and angered by the unconscious attitudes toward his loss. He was expected to “cope,” while I was nurtured through my “need.” We’ve struggled for male responsibility in birth control, sexual mutuality, childbirth, and child-rearing, and I think we need to acknowledge that those men who do engage in such transformed practices have mourning rights during a pregnancy loss, as well.

Nonetheless, our experiences *were* different, and I’m compelled to recognize the material reality of my experience. Because it happened in my body, a woman’s body, I recovered much more slowly than Mike did. By whatever mysterious process, he was able to damp back the pain, and throw himself back into work after several weeks. For me, it took months. As long as I had the fourteen pounds of pregnancy weight to lose, as long as my aching breasts, filled with milk, couldn’t squeeze into bras, as long as my tummy muscles protruded, I was confronted with the physical reality of being post-pregnant, without a child. Mike’s support seemed inadequate; I was still in deep mourning while he seemed distant and cured. Only much later, when I began doing research on amniocentesis, did I find one study of the stresses and strains of selective abortion. In a small sample of couples, a high percentage separated or divorced following this experience. Of course, the same holds true after couples face a child’s disablement, or child death. Still, I had no idea that deep mourning for a fetus could be so disorienting. Abortion after prenatal diagnosis has been kept a medical and private experience, so there is no common fund of knowledge or support to alert us as individuals, as couples, as families, as friends, to the aftermath our “freedom of choice” entails.

Which is why I’ve pierced my private pain to raise this issue. As feminists, we need to speak from our seemingly private experience toward a social and political agenda. I’m suggesting we lift the veil of privacy and professionalism to explore issues of health care, abortion, and the right to choose death, as well as life, for our genetically disabled fetuses. If XYLO’s story, a true story, has helped to make this a compelling issue for more than one couple, then his five short months of fetal life will have been a great gift.



The Ethics of the Person

In the last chapter we outlined the family of person-centered values like this:

P E R S O N S

The Ethics of the Person affirms that persons are special, precious, and have a dignity that demands respect. No one is to be reduced to a mere means to others' ends. Social relations require fairness, justice, and equality. Human and civil rights are essential too: they secure the space in which each person is recognized and can flourish.

Let us now explore the Ethics of the Person in more detail.

VALUING PERSONS

Values ultimately arise from our experience. We may try to speak for them abstractly or theoretically, so much so that sometimes we may lose the connection back to the basics that motivated them in the first place. Still, we can always ask, of any such value, where it comes from: how it traces back to concrete experience. A good place to start, then, is with the kinds of experiences that bring *persons* to our attention, and in an insistent ethical light, it turns out, from the beginning.

I am sure that there are times in your life when some other individual suddenly stands out of the background of friends or co-workers or even strangers on the street, out of routine everyday experience, and you are brought up short with a realization: here is a unique spark, another self or soul, fascinating and endless in its complexity and depth. Falling in love can be like that, sometimes, but it can also happen on the sidewalk and with people you don't

know and will never see again. Even a brief encounter with another person can be complete in itself, and it may change the way we experience not just him or her but people in general.

One of my students wrote about meeting a homeless woman in New York's Pennsylvania Station.

I was waiting for a friend, but she was late and I was all alone and scared. A woman who was selling spin tops outside the station saw me and came over to me. She asked my name and I told her and she said her name was Mona Lisa. We ended up talking for an hour and a half. . . . She told me all about her life and how she ended up in the streets of New York. All for love . . .

A country kid, alone and frightened on a first visit to New York, approached by a kind of person she had never known face to face, who she knew only as a stereotype—the *homeless*—repeated a thousand times over on television and in the papers: still this student found herself able to see her and respond to her as a person, as “Mona Lisa” did in return.

Responding in this way is not at all the same as just being nice. To be “nice” would have been to buy a spin top and back away: to stay on the level of habit and stereotyped response. This student did something entirely different. She responded to something unique and unexpected in this stranger, and some very basic recognition and affirmation then passed between them. We don't even know whether “Mona Lisa's” story is true, but the interesting thing is that it doesn't exactly matter, either. The point is that her story, embellished or entirely made up as it might have been, is a reflection of a personality, and the unexpected and unlikely emergence of *that*, out of fear and stereotype, was the great learning for my student.

We also know what it's like when others do not treat us as persons in this sense. Cheery salespeople greet you on the phone like an old friend but hang up in mid-sentence when they realize that they are not going to make a sale. How do you feel? What was *missed*? Sexual exploitation—realizing that you are only a body for someone else, only a means to someone else's momentary pleasure—is far more deeply chilling. We say, “You're just treating me like an object.” Cases in which people are completely reduced to “things” are among the greatest of evils. The Nazi concentration camps were designed to dehumanize: it is no surprise that they were the first step to mass slaughter.

The key ethical recognition is that none of us are really just “objects” that can be related to as if we are just things, easily reduced to someone else's stereotype or “use.” Philosophers put it like this: we are *subjects* (as opposed to “objects”), centers of our own experience and thinking, our own hopes and fears and dreams, choices large and small. And, crucially, we recognize also that others are just like us—and just as precious—in the same way.

ETHICAL PHILOSOPHIES OF "THE OTHER"

Some philosophers have worked out their ethical perspectives by trying to carefully describe and more deeply understand experiences like these.

Martin Buber (1898–1965), an Austrian and Israeli philosopher and theologian, was especially concerned to recover and defend the recognition of persons in a time when he saw depersonalization increasing dramatically. In his most famous book *I and Thou*, originally written in 1923, Buber tried to go back to absolute basics and to carefully describe the encounter with persons in this sense—with the *Other*, as he put it: as unique and self-determining beings.

Too often, Buber says, we “go over the surface of the world” and just “pile up information” without really going to the depths of anything. When we confront a “Thou” or a “You,” however, we are pulled up short. The Other we are encountering “is no longer He or She, limited by other Hes or Shes, a dot in the world grid of space and time, nor . . . a loose bundle of named qualities. Neighborless and seamless, he fills the firmament. Not as if there were nothing else but he, but everything lives in his light.” Buber says that this kind of encounter as if it strikes us with a “flash,” like lightning. The “You” or “Thou” is unpredictable, spontaneous, deep. Our “I”—the other half of the “I/Thou” relationship—is transformed too: we no longer stand apart but are wholly engaged with the other person. “Relation is reciprocity.”

And it is, naturally, deeply ethical. To see others in this way is to treasure them—certainly not to stand in their way or impose anything upon them, but much more too: to recognize a profound kind of value, both in the other person and in the encounter itself. We stand in awe and respond with respect. Buber goes on to conceive our relation to God in similar relational terms.

True, it’s not really as though the only way to experience persons is in this electrifying, one-on-one kind of way, totally distinct from everyday habitual experience. Most of the time, as Buber admits, we relate to other people both as subjects and objects, and in other ways besides (as parts of “We’s” for example). Still, by returning to basics and exalting one compelling way in which the world of persons opens up to us, Buber reminds us of a core ethical experience, even if not the only one. In fact we have an “innate longing for relation,” he says, traceable even in the attentions of babies and in animistic worldviews. We want the whole world to be alive to the I/Thou relation.

Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995) was a French philosopher whose ethical thinking was shaped both by Buber’s work and by his experiences in the brutal environments of war and as a captured Jewish French soldier in a Nazi prisoner-of-war camp. He looks specifically at the experience of another’s *face*. Like Buber, Levinas is concerned that we not glance over the face too fast, as if everything there is to know about the person were somehow on the surface, just pieces of “objective information” (that is, having to do with the self as object), to be defined or pinned down. Instead, Levinas stresses the unplumbable depth of a person, which may be seen through the face but

not, as it were, *on* the face. The Face is an opening, as he puts it, to “infinity.” When we really see a person as a person, Levinas says, we don’t even notice the person’s features, like their eye color—a very interesting fact, wouldn’t you say? What we do see is their spontaneity, their “inexhaustibility”—that is, that they can’t be pinned down or objectified.

And then, Levinas concludes, we also can’t do violence to them. The Other also demands infinite respect. Of course Levinas cannot deny that people actually do violence to one another all the time. His suggestion is that when we do, though, we either have not really seen the other’s face at all (which is often literally true: think of how readily we can do things to people at a distance that we could never do if they were right in front of us and looking us in the eye) or do it in “uneasy awareness” of what an evil we are doing. We see their faces but deny our own response.

Dialogue is another way that others’ “infinity” opens up to us. Here too, as in the face literally, there is spontaneity, something more and unknown, always just now emerging. Indeed, Levinas says that the “face” names both the actual face and also the tendency for the Other, in whatever way, to “exceed the idea of him in me.” “The face refuses to be contained.” “The other overflows absolutely every idea I can have of him.”

Levinas insists that ethics always comes first. We don’t “pile up information,” as Buber puts it, about the world or about others, and then, later, somewhere down the road, get an ethics. No: ethics shapes how we relate to the world from the very start. Knowledge is only possible through love, he says. “Knowledge of love” works before “love of knowledge.” The only way we can really know anything about the other person is to see them in this “infinite” way.

THE IMAGE OF GOD

Another way that ethical thinkers have understood the special value of persons is religious. In Genesis 1:26–27, God is said to have made humans “in his own image”: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, in our likeness . . .’ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him.” Human persons are therefore pictured as uniquely and directly partaking in God’s own nature. We too can comprehend the world rationally and with full self-consciousness; we too are free beings, able to deliberate and choose for ourselves; we too can create worlds, in a sense, and re-create even ourselves; and as a result we too can act morally and think ethically, consciously identifying values and bringing them into reality.

The moral upshot is that in loving God we are also called to love other humans—and ourselves—as reflections of God. The traits that make us persons—self-consciousness, creative freedom, morality itself—are the ways in which we mirror God, and consequently are of supreme value. They define an ethic both of self-respect and of a profound respect for other humans. Not that it’s easy: the very freedom that makes us Godlike persons also gives us

the possibility of falling away, turning from God and also from the reflection of God in one another and even ourselves. Correspondingly, though, striving to live in accord with the “image of God” in one’s life can be seen as a quest for one’s essential self.

Of course there are differences. Jews and Christians often picture God as a Father and speak of persons as all being equal and precious as “children of God.” Muslims understand God (Allah) as more distinct and unique—though Allah nonetheless has seemingly human characteristics, such as compassion, mercy, wisdom, and goodness. Muslims also do not think of Allah as having children: instead we’re related to God as his creatures and as servants (in an affirmative sense, that is, not as slaves but as free service-givers).

Yet the idea that persons are special, sacred, morally central “subjects,” even of infinite value, is emphatically shared. Commenting on the killing of Abel by his brother Cain, the Quran tells us that “Anyone who saves one life, it is as if he has saved the whole of mankind, and anyone who has killed another person (except in lieu of murder or mischief on earth), it is as if he has killed the whole of mankind” (5:32). There is a kind of “infinity” too: somehow a single self can be a moral microcosm of the whole world. There is a very similar teaching in the Jewish Mishnah: “Anyone who destroys a single person, the Torah accounts it to him as if he has destroyed a whole world. And anyone who maintains a single person, the Torah accounts it to him as if he maintained a whole world” (*Sanhedrin* 4:5).

A whole ethics then follows—in parallel ways across the great traditions. There is a shared prohibition against murder: “Thou shalt not kill.” The preciousness of persons must be maintained in all things: so there are shared prohibitions of theft, dishonesty, unprovoked war, callousness to the sufferings of others as well. We are enjoined to help reduce suffering, to care for those who need help. “Love your neighbor as yourself”—for you are equally beloved creatures of God.

All of this is idealistic, of course. In practice, as we also know, people in all the great traditions (and not just the religious ones) are capable of huge moral blind spots, selective and self-serving interpretations, and, alas, ongoing hatefulness. Christianity has been harsh in its treatments of heretics and unbelievers and has been deeply mistrusted in the Muslim world ever since the Crusades. The historical parts of the Old Testament are all too often records of wars and slaughters. Likewise, the lovely quote from the Quran above comes in the midst of a violent harangue against Jews and Christians. In modern times too, as we know all too well, mistrust and hatred continue. Yet it is at least somewhat reassuring that at the hearts of all of these religions—the point toward which all but the harshest feel the pull and which many of the most intent never leave—is still the message of love and respect for one another, premised, once again, on the profound value of the person and modelled on the personhood of God. We are left with the ongoing challenge to better live up to it.

READING 8

“Le Chambon”

PHILIP HALLIE

PHILIP HALLIE (1922–1994) was an American philosopher who explored the dark sides of human nature to better understand the ways in which ethics nonetheless can move us “From Cruelty to Goodness,” as he puts it in the title of the essay from which this excerpt is taken.

In the course of this search, as Hallie tells us here, he discovered the story of the French village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon, whose inhabitants managed to save 6,000 Jewish people from the Nazis during World War II, despite the savagely anti-Semitic German occupation and the presence of an SS division nearby. Notice, though, that Hallie is not telling us this story as a historian, though it is certainly based upon history. His interest is in the *ethics*: in how such acts were not only possible but seemed totally natural—indeed, as if there were no other alternatives—to the people who did them, even though it was at great risk to their own lives and over the course of many years.

The opposite of cruelty, Hallie came to see, is not merely the absence of cruelty but the presence of something positive, which he calls *hospitality*. Hospitality is a complete and unreserved recognition and “welcome” to the Other. Strikingly, Buber also uses the term “welcome,” in much the same sense: we not only recognize something of value in other persons but open-heartedly embrace them, as if (again) there were no other way.

Hallie’s story gives us one very concrete sense then, of what it means to value persons. It is not just a matter of externals—rescuing imperiled innocents—though of course that is the outcome, and from a practical point of view, we might think, the main point. Hallie and his respondents are careful to distinguish Le Chambon’s kind of welcome from the rescue activities of the Swiss, which had the same external outcome—refugees’ lives were saved—but had, they say, a very different heart. Just as crucial for ethics is, once again, the experience: the very distinctive kind of response to Others that Le Chambon’s rescue expressed and from which it flowed.

Pay attention also to the role of religious understandings in the story. One central figure, Hallie says, was Le Chambon’s

Philip Hallie, “Le Chambon,” from *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed: The Story of the Village of Le Chambon, and How Goodness Happened There*. New York: Harper & Row, 1979, p. 117.

Huguenot minister with his activist ethic of nonviolence. The Huguenots' literalist faith was important too, as was their own history of persecution, to the point that the very paths by which they shepherded Jewish children over the French Alps to safety in Switzerland were the same paths, remembered literally for centuries, that their own ancestors used to flee the pogroms of the French Catholics. A history of persecution can sensitize you to the persecution of others—though sometimes it can also have the opposite effect.

But there is more still. The people of Le Chambon managed to see, even in the midst of universal killing and war, that "every human being was just as precious as God Himself." Notice the spectacular generosity of the Huguenot minister, at least, who in the midst of all the horror still understood the rescue not only as saving the Jews but also saving the *Germans*—their would-be murderers. And the unforgettable scene in which a Jewish mother, desperately begging for eggs for her children at the risk of utter betrayal—being Jewish was virtually a death sentence in occupied Europe—is instead embraced with joy by an ordinary farm-woman as one of the Chosen People. *Welcome* indeed!

If cruelty is one of the main evils of human history, why is the opposite of cruelty not one of the key goods of human history? Freedom from the cruel relationship, either by escaping it or by redressing the imbalance of power, was not essential to what western philosophers and theologians have thought of as goodness. Escape is a negative affair. Goodness has something positive in it, something triumphantly affirmative.

Hoping for a hint of goodness in the very center of evil, I started looking closely at the so-called "medical experiments" of the Nazis upon children, usually Jewish and Gypsy children, in the death camps. Here were the weakest of the weak. Not only were they despised minorities, but they were, as individuals, still in their nonage. They were dependents. Here the power imbalance between the cruel experimenters and their victims was at its greatest. But instead of seeing light or finding insight by going down into this hell, into the deepest depth of cruelty, I found myself unwillingly becoming part of the world I was studying. I found myself either yearning to be viciously cruel to the victimizers of the children, or I found myself feeling compassion for the children, feeling their despair and pain as they looked up at the men and women in white coats cutting off their fingertips one at a time, or breaking their slender bones, or wounding their internal organs. Either I became a would-be victimizer or one more Jewish victim, and in either case I was

not achieving insight, only misery, like so many other students of the Holocaust. And when I was trying to be “objective” about my studies, when I was succeeding at being indifferent to both the victimizers and the victims of these cruel relationships, I became cold; I became another monster who could look upon the maiming of a child with an indifferent eye.

To relieve this unending suffering, from time to time I would turn to the literature of the French resistance to the Nazis. I had been trained by the U.S. Army to understand it. The resistance was a way of trying to redress the power imbalance between Hitler’s Fortress Europe and Hitler’s victims, and so I saw it as an enemy of cruelty. Still, its methods were often cruel like the methods of most power struggles, and I had little hope of finding goodness here. We soldiers violated the negative ethic forbidding killing in order, we thought, to follow the positive ethic of being our brothers’ keepers.

And then one gray April afternoon I found a brief article on the French village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon. I shall not analyze here the tears of amazement and gladness and release from despair—in short, of joy—that I shed when I first read that story. Tears themselves interest me greatly—but not the tears of melancholy hindsight and existential despair; rather the tears of awe you experience when the realization of an ideal suddenly appears before your very eyes or thunders inside your mind; these tears interest me.

And one of the reasons I wept at first reading about Le Chambon in those brief, inaccurate pages was that at last I had discovered an embodiment of goodness in opposition to cruelty. I had discovered in the flesh and blood of history, in people with definite names in a definite place at a definite time in the nightmare of history, what no classical or religious ethicist could deny was goodness.

The French Protestant village of Le Chambon, located in the Cévennes Mountains of southeastern France, and with a population of about 3,500, saved the lives of about 6,000 people, most of them Jewish children whose parents had been murdered in the killing camps of central Europe. Under a national government which was not only collaborating with the Nazi conquerors of France but frequently trying to outdo the Germans in anti-Semitism in order to please their conquerors, and later under the day-to-day threat of destruction by the German Armed SS, they started to save children in the winter of 1940, the winter after the fall of France, and they continued to do so until the war in France was over. They sheltered the refugees in their own homes and in various houses they established especially for them; and they took many of them

across the terrible mountains to neutral Geneva, Switzerland, in the teeth of French and German police and military power. The people of Le Chambon are poor, and the Huguenot faith to which they belong is a diminishing faith in Catholic and atheist France; but their spiritual power, their capacity to act in unison against the victimizers who surrounded them, was immense, and more than a match for the military power of those victimizers.

But for me as an ethicist the heart of the matter was not only their special power. What interested me was that they obeyed *both* the negative and the positive injunctions of ethics; they were good not only in the sense of trying to be their brothers' keepers, protecting the victim, "defending the fatherless," to use the language of Isaiah; they were also good in the sense that they obeyed the negative injunctions against killing and betraying. While those around them—including myself—were murdering in order, presumably, to help mankind in some way or other, they murdered nobody, and betrayed not a single child in those long and dangerous four years. For me as an ethicist they were the embodiment of unambiguous goodness.

But for me as a student of cruelty they were something more: they were an embodiment of the opposite of cruelty. And so, somehow, at last, I had found goodness in opposition to cruelty. In studying their story, and in telling it in *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed*, I learned that the opposite of cruelty is not simply freedom from the cruel relationship; it is *hospitality*. It lies not only in something negative, an absence of cruelty or of imbalance; it lies in unsentimental, efficacious love. The opposite of the cruelties of the camps was not the liberation of the camps, the cleaning out of the barracks and the cessation of the horrors. All of this was the *end* of the cruelty relationship, not the opposite of that relationship. And it was not even the end of it, because the victims would never forget and would remain in agony as long as they remembered their humiliation and suffering. No, the opposite of cruelty was not the liberation of the camps, not freedom; it was the hospitality of the people of Le Chambon, and of very few others during the Holocaust. The opposite of cruelty was the kind of goodness that happened in Le Chambon.

Let me explain the difference between liberation and hospitality by telling you about a letter I received a year ago from a woman who had been saved by the people of Le Chambon when she was a young girl. She wrote:

Never was there a question that the Chambonnais would not share all they had with us, meager as it was. One Chambonnais once told me that even if there was less, they still would want more for us.

And she goes on:

It was indeed a very different attitude from the one in Switzerland, which while saving us also resented us so much.

If today we are not bitter people like most survivors it can only be due to the fact that we met people like the people of Le Chambon, who showed to us simply that life can be different, that there are people who care, that people can live together and even risk their own lives for their fellow man.

The Swiss liberated refugees and removed them from the cruel relationship; the people of Le Chambon did more. They taught them that goodness could conquer cruelty, that loving hospitality could remove them from the cruel relationship. And they taught me this, too.

It is important to emphasize that cruelty is not simply an episodic, momentary matter, especially institutional cruelty like that of Nazism or slavery. Not only does it persist while it is being exerted upon the weak; *it can persist in the survivors* after they have escaped the power relationship. The survivors torture themselves, continue to suffer, continue to maim their own lives long after the actual torture is finished. The self-hatred and rage of the blacks and the despair of the native Americans and the Jews who have suffered under institutional crushing and maiming are continuations of original cruelties. And these continuations exist because only a superficial liberation from torture has occurred. The sword has stopped falling on their flesh in the old obvious ways, but the wounds still bleed. I am not saying that the village of Le Chambon healed these wounds—they go too deep. What I am saying is that the people I have talked to who were once children in Le Chambon have more hope for their species and more respect for themselves as human beings than most other survivors I have met. The enduring hospitality they met in Le Chambon helped them find realistic hope in a world of persisting cruelty.

What was the nature of this hospitality that saved and deeply changed so many lives? It is hard to summarize briefly what the Chambonnais did, and above all how they did it. The morning after a new refugee family came to town they would find on their front door a wreath with “*Bienvenue!*” “Welcome!” painted on a piece of cardboard attached to the wreath. Nobody knew who had brought the wreath; in effect, the whole town had brought it.

It was mainly the women of Le Chambon who gave so much more than shelter to these, the most hated enemies of the Nazis. There was Madame Barraud, a tiny Alsatian, who cared for the refugee boys in her house with all the love such a tiny body could

hold, and who cared for the way they felt day and night. And there were others.

But there was one person without whom Le Chambon could not have become the safest place in Europe for Jews: the Huguenot minister of the village, André Trocmé. Trocmé was a passionately religious man. He was massive, more than six feet tall, blonde, with a quick temper. Once long after the war, while he was lecturing on the main project of his life, the promotion of the idea of nonviolence in international relations, one of the members of his audience started to whisper a few words to his neighbor. Trocmé let this go on for a few moments, then interrupted his speech, walked up to the astonished whisperer, raised his massive arm, pointed toward the door, and yelled, "Out! Out! Get out!" And the lecture was on nonviolence.

The center of his thought was the belief that God showed how important man was by becoming Himself a human being, and by becoming a particular sort of human being who was the embodiment of sacrificially generous love. For Trocmé, every human being was like Jesus, had God in him or her, and was just as precious as God Himself. And when Trocmé with the help of the Quakers and others organized his village into the most efficient rescue machine in Europe, he did so not only to save the Jews, but also to save the Nazis and their collaborators. He wanted to keep them from blackening their souls with more evil—he wanted to save them, the victimizers, from evil.

One of the reasons he was successful was that the Huguenots had been themselves persecuted for hundreds of years by the kings of France, and they knew what persecution was. In fact, when the people of Le Chambon took Jewish children and whole families across the mountains of southeastern France into neutral Switzerland, they often followed pathways that had been taken by Huguenots in their flight from the Dragoons of the French kings.

A particular incident from the story of Le Chambon during the Nazi occupation of France will explain succinctly why he was successful in making the village a village of refuge. But before I relate the story, I must point out that the people of the village did not think of themselves as "successful," let alone as "good." From their point of view, they did not do anything that required elaborate explanation. When I asked them why they helped these dangerous guests, they invariably answered, "What do you mean, 'Why'? Where else could they go? How could you turn them away? What is so special about being ready to help (*prête à servir*)? There was nothing else to do." And some of them laughed in amazement when

I told them that I thought they were “good people.” They saw no alternative to their actions and to the way they acted, and therefore they saw what they did as necessary, not something to be picked out for praise. Helping these guests was for them as natural as breathing or eating—one does not think of alternatives to these functions; they did not think of alternatives to sheltering people who were endangering not only the lives of their hosts but the lives of all the people of the village.

And now the story. One afternoon a refugee woman knocked on the door of a farmhouse outside the village. The farmers around the village proper were Protestants like most of the others in Le Chambon, but with one difference: they were mostly “Darbyistes,” followers of a strange Scot named Darby, who taught their ancestors in the nineteenth century to believe every word of the Bible, and indeed, who had them memorize the Bible. They were literal fundamentalists. The farm-woman opened the door to the refugee and invited her into the kitchen where it was warm. Standing in the middle of the floor the refugee, in heavily accented French, asked for eggs for her children. In those days of very short supplies, people with children often went to the farmers in the “gray market” (neither black nor exactly legal) to get necessary food. This was early in 1941, and the farmers were not yet accustomed to the refugees. The farm-woman looked into the eyes of the shawled refugee and asked, “Are you Jewish?” The woman started to tremble, but she could not lie, even though that question was usually the beginning of the end of life for Jews in Hitler’s Fortress Europe. She answered, “Yes.”

The woman ran from the kitchen to the staircase nearby, and while the refugee trembled with terror in the kitchen, she called up the stairs, “Husband, children, come down, come down! We have in our house at this very moment a representative of the Chosen People!”

Not all the Protestants in Le Chambon were Darbyiste fundamentalists; but almost all were convinced that people are the children of God, and are as precious as God Himself. Their leaders were Huguenot preachers and their following of the negative and positive commandments of the Bible came in part from their personal generosity and courage, but also in part from the depths of their religious conviction that we are all children of God, and we must take care of each other lovingly. This combined with the ancient and deep historical ties between the Huguenots and the Jews of France and their own centuries of persecution by the Dragoons and Kings of France helped make them what they were, “always ready to help,” as the Chambonnais saying goes.

KANT'S CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

Consider now a form of the Ethics of the Person famously laid out by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. Kant's approach is sharply and intriguingly different from the experience-based or religious Ethics of Persons so far discussed, but he ends up—very much on purpose—with the same ethical conclusion: defending the unique and unassailable moral value of persons.

MEANS AND ENDS

We know the language of “means.” A means is a way of getting something. A car is a means of getting around, money is a means of buying what we want or need to live. An “end,” by contrast, is valued at least in part for its own sake. It is not just one more link in a chain of means, but the place where the chain comes to a conclusion—the “end.”

To some degree, as Buber notes, we inevitably are means to each other. A waiter is partly a means of getting food; a parent is partly a means of support. But Kant's claim is that we get the world wrong—we mistake reality itself—if we take other people (or ourselves!) just as means in this sense. Another person is not *merely* a way to get something for ourselves, whether it be something trivial or something vital, such as ongoing pleasure or company. We are all also centers of our own experience and thinking and choice. Kant aims to show that persons are not just means but also “ends in themselves.”

Levinas and Buber appeal to somewhat inexpressible experiences to justify their moral claims. The religious traditions base their appeals on revelation. By contrast, Kant is committed to working out an *argument* to back up his moral claims: a spelled-out, step-by-step chain of reasoning from widely acceptable empirical or rational premises—not necessarily an easy task, but surely an essential one! But it is here that Kant makes his distinctive contribution.

A CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

The essence of ethics, according to Kant, is to live according to the moral law. That is, to act ethically is not merely to act in accord with “inclination” (to be ethical because it pleases us, even if it does in fact please us) or even to act in opposition to inclination (because we would still be in the orbit of inclination, and thus unfreedom, still obsessed with desire even if now for the purpose of putting it down). No: to be ethical is to do what is right simply because it is right. It is of the essence of ethics to be impersonal, impartial—not to depend on passing, personal feeling. (This is also the essence of freedom, or what Kant calls *autonomy*.)

Means-thinking, however, is situational and dependent. It is “partial.” It recommends things to us conditionally: if we want such and such, then we

should choose something else which is a means to it. Accordingly, Kant calls this a *Hypothetical Imperative*. But ethics, says Kant, applies “categorically.” It is not dependent on something else, but calls to us simply by virtue of our ability to think of it in the first place. No ifs. Thus Kant seeks what he calls the *Categorical Imperative*: a basic obligation that applies to us regardless of our other goals or our situation. Again: simply because it is right.

Kant’s “moral law,” then, is no merely political or legal “law.” “Law” for Kant means a universal principle that all rational minds could hold themselves to in the situation in question. That is, the idea of “law” leads us to the ideal of universality, and thus to the recognition that, even though I may be deciding for myself, to decide ethically means to decide as one rational mind among others, as if setting the law for all. Anyone else in the same situation should do the same thing.

The first form of Kant’s Categorical Imperative therefore is this:

Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.

By “maxim” Kant means the rule you propose to yourself when trying to decide what to do. This form of the Categorical Imperative therefore is a test to see whether the rule you have in mind can be ethical: the test is whether you could consistently will it to be a rule that everyone follows.

Should I lie, for example, to get myself out of an embarrassing or sticky situation? No, says Kant. I could not will it to be a universal law that everyone should lie to get out of a sticky situation—for then no such lie would work. On the contrary: by wanting my lie to work, I am implicitly willing that others *not* lie in the same situation. I require the general expectation of truthfulness to be maintained so that my own lie will succeed. Thus, really, I am only making an exception for myself to a general moral law that I still wish everyone else to uphold.

Here is where everything goes wrong. Formally, I am engaged in a contradiction of will. Logically, it is irrational: a failure to think and act as a rational being. Psychologically, it is to take myself to be somehow different or more special than other people—for nothing else could justify my flaunting a rule that I expect everyone else to follow. But this is a mistake, a self-delusion. Just because *my* subjectivity—my feeling of *me*-ness: my feared embarrassment or inconvenience if I tell the truth, in this case—is front-and-center for *me* is no reason to act as if no one else has the same kind of subjectivity front-and-center for *them*. It is to impose inconvenience (or worse) on them just because, so to speak, they’re them and I am me. And nothing objective can justify that. Certainly we don’t inhabit each other’s subjectivities in the way we inhabit our own, but it is quite another matter to therefore act as if only we have a subjectivity at all.

"Making an exception for myself," then, turns out to be a flat-out kind of factual mistake. It is not just a matter of bad habits or habitual inconsiderateness. More than that: to act on a "maxim" that I know I cannot "universalize" is in some sense to really believe that I am more real than other people. But the obvious and everyday fact is that others are just as real and special as I am.

The mistake is not quite a matter of egoism or self-centeredness. An egoist may still recognize other people as people: it may even be necessary in order to satisfactorily exploit them. What Kant has in mind is more subtle, more specific, and in a way a bit spookier. To make an exception for myself, I must live in a world where my *me*-ness fills the screen, like a play in which I am the star and everyone else is, at best, just extras—in fact, more like stage sets and props. The point of ethics, again, is that others are centers of experience and choice as real as we know ourselves to be. Their needs and legitimate expectations count as much as mine.

OTHER FORMS OF THE CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE

Kant proposes three other forms of what he thinks is one basic Categorical Imperative. The most approachable form, officially the second, he puts explicitly in terms of ends and means:

Always act so as to treat humanity, whether in yourself or in another, as an end and never merely as a means.

Notice that Kant is careful here. He is not saying that we should never treat others as means at all. Again, the truth is that we must. The point for both Kant and Buber is that we must also always keep alive a fuller and more complete sense of others as more-than-Its, more-than-means, just as we are (to) ourselves.

Yet another way to put it is the fourth, or "Kingdom of Ends" form of the Categorical Imperative:

Act in accordance with the maxims of a member giving universal laws for a merely possible kingdom of ends.

This is a more social way to put it: here we are more explicitly invited to see ourselves as one among other ethical decision-makers all thinking from a universal point of view—a "kingdom" in the sense of an ideal community. It also turns out that this capacity for universalistic thinking—which Kant considers just *rationality*—is the "humanity" referred to in the second formulation: this is one way of understanding why Kant thinks they all say the same thing in the end. We affirm each other's personhood in the form of our shared embrace of a universal point of view.

READING 9

From *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*

IMMANUEL KANT

IMMANUEL KANT (1724–1804) was born in the Prussian city of Königsberg (now Russian Kaliningrad) where he was educated and taught for his whole life. He was a scientific thinker as well as a philosopher: his first original contributions were in cosmology. Controversial in his time, Kant was also very influential for a number of his contemporaries, and his influence has only grown since. Today he is considered a central figure in the development of modern philosophy in all of its main branches. The most significant of his ethical works are *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) and *Metaphysics of Morals* (1798).

Now I say: man and generally any rational being exists as an end in himself, not merely as a means to be arbitrarily used by this or that will, but in all his actions, whether they concern himself or other rational beings, must be always regarded at the same time as an end.

. . . Beings whose existence depends not on our will but on nature's, have nevertheless, if they are irrational beings, only a relative value as means, and are therefore called things. Rational beings, on the contrary, are called persons, because their very nature points them out as ends in themselves, that is as something which must not be used merely as means, and so far therefore restricts freedom of action (and is an object of respect). These, therefore, are not merely subjective ends whose existence has a worth for us as an effect of our action, but objective ends, that is, things whose existence is an end in itself; an end moreover for which no other can be substituted, which they should subserve merely as means, for otherwise nothing whatever would possess absolute worth; but if all worth were conditioned and therefore contingent, then there would be no supreme practical principle of reason whatever.

If then there is a supreme practical principle or, in respect of the human will, a categorical imperative, it must be one which, being drawn from the conception of that which is necessarily an end for everyone because it is an end in itself, constitutes an

Selections from *The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* by Immanuel Kant.

objective principle of will, and can therefore serve as a universal practical law. The foundation of this principle is: rational nature exists as an end in itself. Man necessarily conceives his own existence as being so; so far then this is a subjective principle of human actions. But every other rational being regards its existence similarly, just on the same rational principle that holds for me: so that it is at the same time an objective principle, from which as a supreme practical law all laws of the will must be capable of being deduced. Accordingly the practical imperative will be as follows: So act as to treat humanity, whether in thine own person or in that of any other, in every case as an end withal, never as means only.

[Declaring that we must now see whether such a "practical imperative" can be put into action, Kant considers a range of examples. One of these is the case of the lie in the sticky situation, discussed in the text. Kant considers it in terms of both forms of the Categorical Imperative. Here it is in terms of the "end in itself" form. —AW]

He who is thinking of making a lying promise to others will see at once that he would be using another man merely as a means, without the latter containing at the same time the end in himself. For he whom I propose by such a promise to use for my own purposes cannot possibly assent to my mode of acting towards him and, therefore, cannot himself contain the end of this action. This violation of the principle of humanity in other men is more obvious if we take in examples of attacks on the freedom and property of others. For then it is clear that he who transgresses the rights of men intends to use the person of others merely as a means, without considering that as rational beings they ought always to be esteemed also as ends, that is, as beings who must be capable of containing in themselves the end of the very same action.

[Here is the same case considered in terms of the "universal law" form of the Categorical Imperative. —AW]

A [person] finds himself forced by necessity to borrow money. He knows that he will not be able to repay it, but sees also that nothing will be lent to him unless he promises stoutly to repay it in a definite time. He desires to make this promise, but he has still so much conscience as to ask himself: "Is it not unlawful and inconsistent with duty to get out of a difficulty in this way?" Suppose however that he resolves to do so: then the maxim of his action would be expressed thus: "When I think myself in want of money, I will borrow money and promise to repay it, although I know that I never can do so." Now this principle of self-love or of one's own

advantage may perhaps be consistent with my whole future welfare; but the question now is, "Is it right?" I change then the suggestion of self-love into a universal law, and state the question thus: "How would it be if my maxim were a universal law?" Then I see at once that it could never hold as a universal law of nature, but would necessarily contradict itself. For supposing it to be a universal law that everyone when he thinks himself in a difficulty should be able to promise whatever he pleases, with the purpose of not keeping his promise, the promise itself would become impossible, as well as the end that one might have in view in it, since no one would consider that anything was promised to him, but would ridicule all such statements as vain pretences. . . .

If now we attend to ourselves on occasion of any transgression of duty, we shall find that we in fact do not will that our maxim should be a universal law, for that is impossible for us; on the contrary, we will that the opposite should remain a universal law, only we assume the liberty of making an exception in our own favour or (just for this time only) in favour of our inclination. Consequently if we considered all cases from one and the same point of view, namely, that of reason, we should find a contradiction in our own will, namely, that a certain principle should be objectively necessary as a universal law, and yet subjectively should not be universal, but admit of exceptions. . . . Now, although this cannot be justified in our own impartial judgement, yet it proves that we do really recognise the validity of the categorical imperative and (with all respect for it) only allow ourselves a few exceptions, which we think unimportant and forced from us.

RIGHTS AND PERSONS

You see that the Ethics of the Person can take a variety of quite different forms. Indeed, there are many more than we can consider here. In this section we briefly consider one more, different again from those so far considered. This is the framework of *rights*.

WHAT ARE RIGHTS?

Rights are principles of freedom or entitlement that create a space for an individual's (or group's or institution's) action, subject to the limitations of others' rights, or constrain the actions of others in order to protect and preserve the freedom of the right-holder. The "Bill of Rights" in the United States Constitution,

for example, includes (among others) the right to free speech, free practice of religion (or not), and freedom of assembly. Every day and in the papers and in political and other debates we also speak of such rights as “gay rights,” “property rights,” “rights of way” (as in traffic laws), and loosely of “the right to do as you please”—presumably while not intruding on others’ rights to do the same thing (as in the saying that “Your right to swing your arm stops where my nose begins”). Other rights grant us some portion of certain common provisions, such as education, or participation in common process, such as the right to vote.

In terms of our definition of ethics, rights of this kind often define “legitimate expectations,” like the right to vote or rights of way on the road. The sources of such varied legitimate expectations are also varied. Some are purely conventional. Different systems of traffic laws, for example, allocate right of way in different ways. Which way does not really matter as long as there is some shared rule in the “kingdom,” so to say, of drivers. Other rights gain their immediate force from legal systems, such as the Bill of Rights. We have legally enforceable rights to free speech and gun ownership, for example, courtesy of the Constitution.

There is an element of convention here too, though, for the Constitution itself can be changed. The Bill of Rights itself is actually a series of amendments. Some rights, though, seem to go deeper than convention or law. These are what philosophers call *natural rights* or *human rights*. They seem like entitlements or freedoms that we hold even if convention or law do not recognize them, like the right to basic freedoms such as free speech and movement, after all, and above all the right to life, in the sense of being safe from the harmful intent of others. If we do not have a right to life, no other right makes much sense. Here we may say that the bottom line, even before legitimate expectations, is basic need.

CLASSIC VIEWS

A classic statement of natural rights is Thomas Jefferson’s preface to the *Declaration of Independence*.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.—That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. . . .

On this view, human beings have certain moral claims—rights—so basic they can’t be taken away (that is, “unalienable”). And they are rooted in personhood. It is individual persons who hold the basic rights to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness. Jefferson goes on to invoke the emerging 17th- and 18th-century view of governments as arrangements “instituted among men”

for the sake of securing individual rights—a revolutionary doctrine in his time, for of course, however staid it may seem now, the Declaration was written as a justification for revolution.

We may think of societies and states rather differently in modern times: some argue that society or the state comes first, and individuals are born within it. Yet it remains the case that rights create the necessary space for individual persons to become and be what they are. The first section of this chapter, remember, argues that we are subjects as opposed to mere “objects,” centers of our own experience and thinking, hopes and fears and dreams, and choices large and small. Religious traditions, again, picture the person as a model of God: rational, self-aware, creative, and free. It is this sense of personhood that rights express and protect. Without life and liberty, again, it is pretty hard to act rationally or creatively or to take your own individual path or achieve your own godlikeness.

Some have thought that rights are basically “self-evident,” as Jefferson puts it in his resolutely optimistic 18th-century way. Maybe—though if so, it is hard to see why so many people and societies routinely deny and violate them. More typically, and probably more persuasively, the argument for rights depends on a prior and fundamental commitment to the preciousness of persons. Read this way, rights-ethics may be more of an expression of the Ethics of Persons, in the end, than an argument for it. That is, the appeal to rights does not give an independent argument that can be used to ground the central moral values of persons, but works in reverse: it presupposes the central moral value of persons in order to make the case for rights. Regardless, the association of rights and the Ethics of Persons is long and deep, and it remains the case that for many people today, an ethics of rights is one of the primary ways that the Ethics of Persons shows up in our everyday lives and moral thinking.

VARIETIES OF RIGHTS

Finally, we should briefly note that there are (of course!) many different interpretations of rights. For example, what rights qualify as “natural” or “human” is, not surprisingly, a major question. The rights to life and liberty seem necessary and basic. But what about a right to education, say, or to health care?

There are problems here, though. To provide something like education or health care, others’ resources or even freedom of choice may sometimes have to be constrained. Some philosophers especially concerned with liberty therefore argue that even basic rights like the right to life are only “negative” rights: that is, they only prohibit people doing certain things, but do not (*cannot*) demand that they do other things. The right to life, on this view, only prohibits killing. We’re not required to feed and shelter the needy too, let alone to provide schooling or health care.

Likewise, libertarians are fond of pointing out that Jefferson does not speak of a right to happiness: he only speaks of the right to *pursue* happiness. Success is not guaranteed—and presumably could not be, without constraining a lot

of other people's liberty. On the other hand, sometimes even protecting basic rights like the right to life, even just in the sense of the right not to be killed, requires positive provision, such as a court system and a police force. Some balancing of rights, both negative and "positive," may be inevitable.

Human life is sacred, the religious traditions say, and taking life is therefore wrong. A right to life would seem to immediately follow. But even this might be contested. Catholic moral theology goes on to say that the right to life implies the moral requirement to protect and support those whose life is endangered—especially the poor and dispossessed and disempowered (not, notice, only fetuses). That is, again, the right to life is positive, and extensive. More politically conservative interpreters agree with the Catholic "right to life" stance on abortion but beg to differ on issues such as welfare and capital punishment.

Meantime, one appeal of rights arguments is that sometimes there is a specific mechanism for resolving them: the courts. In our legal system, questions of rights, even when they are basically moral questions, often end up in litigation, as with the recent series of Supreme Court decisions about same-sex marriage, which ended up declaring that gay people have the right to marry nationwide. "They ask for equal dignity in the eyes of the law," Justice Anthony Kennedy wrote in his sweeping decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*. "The Constitution grants them that right." Whether we agree or not, we know the language and understand the argument.

READING 10

From The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights

THE UNITED NATIONS was formed in the wake of the disasters of World War II to try to establish a more stable and cooperative world order and to facilitate dialogue in place of war among nations. Today all internationally recognized sovereign states (192 total) belong to the UN (except Vatican City, which has observer status). Its agencies are active in many causes around the world, including the World Health Organization (WHO), the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the UN High Commission on Refugees, as well as the main deliberative bodies, the General Assembly and Security Council, which are

UN General Assembly, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 10 December 1948, 217 A (III), available at: <http://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6b3712c.html>

also engaged with security issues and with mitigating conflicts around the globe.

A Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948, one of the earliest and most significant acts of that body, becoming one of the fundamental constitutive documents of the UN. Technically its aim was to clarify certain key terms—"fundamental freedoms" and "human rights"—in the UN Charter. Ethically and politically, however, the aim was much larger: to spell out and advance the cause of those freedoms and rights in an uncertain world that needed them affirmed in a succinct, ambitious, and universal way. The hope of Eleanor Roosevelt and its other authors was that the Declaration might have the same influence on the world as the American Declaration of Independence, and later our Bill of Rights, had within the United States. In that it seems to have at least partly succeeded. The UN Declaration of Human Rights has helped to shape (and sometimes is directly cited in) most national constitutions written since 1948, as well as many international laws and treaties. According to *The Guinness Book of World Records*, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is the most translated document in the world.

PREAMBLE

Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,

Whereas disregard and contempt for human rights have resulted in barbarous acts which have outraged the conscience of mankind, and the advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people,

Whereas it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law . . . ,

Whereas the peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom . . . ,

Whereas a common understanding of these rights and freedoms is of the greatest importance for the full realization of this pledge,

Now, Therefore THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY proclaims THIS UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS as a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations, to the end that every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms and by progressive measures, national and international, to secure their universal and effective recognition and observance, both among the peoples of Member States themselves and among the peoples of territories under their jurisdiction.

Article 1. All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

Article 2. Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status . . .

Article 3. Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person.

Article 4. No one shall be held in slavery or servitude; slavery and the slave trade shall be prohibited in all their forms.

Article 5. No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.

Article 6. Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person before the law.

Article 7. All are equal before the law and are entitled without any discrimination to equal protection of the law. All are entitled to equal protection against any discrimination in violation of this Declaration and against any incitement to such discrimination.

Article 8. Everyone has the right to an effective remedy by the competent national tribunals for acts violating the fundamental rights granted him by the constitution or by law.

Article 9. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention or exile.

Article 10. Everyone is entitled in full equality to a fair and public hearing by an independent and impartial tribunal, in the determination of his rights and obligations and of any criminal charge against him.

Article 11. Everyone charged with a penal offence has the right to be presumed innocent until proved guilty according to law in a public trial at which he has had all the guarantees necessary for his defence . . .

Article 12. No one shall be subjected to arbitrary interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to attacks upon his honour and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.

Article 13. Everyone has the right to freedom of movement and residence within the borders of each state. Everyone has the right to leave any country, including his own, and to return to his country.

Article 14. Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution . . .

Article 16. Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution. Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses. The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the State.

Article 17. Everyone has the right to own property alone as well as in association with others. No one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property.

Article 18. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

Article 19. Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Article 20. Everyone has the right to freedom of peaceful assembly and association. No one may be compelled to belong to an association.

Article 21. Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

Article 22. Everyone, as a member of society, has the right to social security and is entitled to realization, through national effort and international co-operation and in accordance with the organization and resources of each State, of the economic, social and cultural rights indispensable for his dignity and the free development of his personality.

Article 23. Everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment. Everyone, without any discrimination, has the right to equal pay for equal work. Everyone who works has the right to just and favorable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity, and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection. Everyone has the right to form and to join trade unions for the protection of his interests.

Article 24. Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay.

Article 25. Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection.

Article 26. Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. . . . Elementary education shall be compulsory.

Article 27. Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits . . .

Article 29. Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible. In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society . . .

COMPLICATIONS

The Ethics of the Person expresses something extraordinary and special about us, from the electrifying “Thou” in Martin Buber’s vision to Kant’s vision of free and equal participants in the “Kingdom of Ends.” You can see why appeals to rights or to the “image of God” within us sometimes can move people and motivate real change.

The basic *limit* of the Ethics of the Person, as with every family of values, is simply that there are other kinds of values too. There are indeed moments of exaltation and “electricity” in the moral life—probably not enough. At the same time, though, much of the moral life has a much more everyday character. Think of ordinary kindness, like just offering a seat on a bus or a smile on the street or a sympathetic ear to a friend or child. This seems to have little to do with rights or rational self-lawgiving or even the Image of God. Yet here too morality lives.

Or again, the Ethics of Relationship reminds us of our solidarity as parents and children, colleagues and comrades. Despite Kant’s insistence that feeling has nothing to do with it, feeling actually has a great deal to do with it—at least much of the time. Sitting quietly with someone we love—or for that matter, playing noisily with them—is typically not “electric” in Buber’s sense, or only in sense of the slow, steady warmth, rather than sparks flying. But this is moral too. Likewise, Margaret Walker (Reading #2) conceives morality in terms of the everyday tasks of “getting and keeping in touch with the realities of self and specific others.” This is very different from the abstract solidarity of universal self-lawgivers.

The Ethics of the Person is *part* of the story of moral values, then, but arguably not the whole. Remember chapter 4’s metaphor of the spotlight. There is much more on stage than what one spotlight will reveal. This is not any kind of objection to the Ethics of the Person—unless you think that somehow there must be just one single story or “logic” of moral values. The Ethics of the Person offers us some quite fine and indeed challenging maps . . . of *some* of the territory of ethics. If that’s where you are going, or where you find yourself, then the Ethics of the Person offers you the maps you need. And that’s all we need expect of it!

COULD PERSON-CENTERED VALUES OVERRIDE ALL OTHERS?

We can’t quite leave matters here, however, because some philosophers actually do hold that there must be (or indeed *is* in fact) just one single story or “logic” of moral values, or at least that one single kind of value overrides or takes precedence over all others in the event of conflict or incompatibility. And this is especially true for some of the values of persons.

Most notably, some philosophers hold that rights always override other types of values, so that others only come into play when rights are satisfied or not violated. Kant held, for his part, that the Categorical Imperative determines the right thing to do in every circumstance—no exceptions, no other moral considerations that might pull in other directions. For example, according to Kant, it is *always* wrong to lie—it is a self-contradiction of will and a use of another person as a means and not an end—no matter what the consequences. Levinas also seems to hold a view of this sort: the “Face” absolutely proscribes certain actions. Some kinds of religious ethics also concur.

We should not be quick to dismiss such views, extreme as they sound. If we hold that some type of action is absolutely wrong, we will try much harder to find some workable alternative to it. Otherwise we might just automatically go ahead, reaching for too-easy excuses. Rather than subordinating someone's property rights to a town's need for a new road, for example, we might work harder and more creatively at re-routing it. One could even argue that the function of rights (say) is sometimes to *create* such blockages: to make it harder to move quickly when there will be serious costs to the rights-holders.

Yet many philosophers respond that this cannot always be true. Kant held, in a classic case, that we are obliged to tell the truth even to a potential murderer asking the whereabouts of a likely victim. But surely lying is the *right* thing to do in this case. The people of Le Chambon (in Reading 8), for example, lied constantly in the course of protecting the vulnerable Jewish people passing through. They misled the Nazi occupiers constantly, both by acts of commission (knowingly false statements) and omission (creating impressions, not correcting misconceptions). Was this not to use the Nazis as means and not ends? Yet for Philip Hallie their actions were morally admirable.

Someone has planted a bomb, say, that may kill a great number of people, and is captured but refuses to say where it is. Can the person be made to reveal its location—dare we say the word “tortured”?—to allow us to find the bomb while it can still be defused? Decent moral people are extremely reluctant to even open the door to such things, but on the other hand, can we really say “Never”?

WHO COUNTS?

Another challenge to the Ethics of Persons is that the notion of “person” itself is not at all as clear as it might seem at first. For one thing, historically, it often functioned as much to exclude as to include. Notoriously, for example, Jefferson's ringing affirmation that “all men are created equal” was never intended to include the black slaves of his time, and moreover he did mean “men” literally, since women had to wait almost 150 years even to get the right to vote in the Republic he helped found. It is true that those very words motivated the struggle to extend “equality”—Martin Luther King Jr. invoked Jefferson at the climax of his famous “I Have a Dream” speech. But how could it not have been “self-evident” to Jefferson and his contemporaries from the start?

Kant's ethics foregrounds the universal self-lawgiver. But this rationalistic conception of persons still surely picks out far too narrow a group. What about children? The mentally handicapped? People for whom reason is only quite a small part of life? Just as I insisted earlier that there are other types of values besides person-centered ones, it must also be said that there are (surely!) other types of persons besides reason-centered ones. Thinkers such as Buber and Levinas, and most religious conceptions of persons, shine the spotlight more broadly. Again there is an uncomfortable level of exclusion here.

Moreover, the concept of “human” does not easily coincide with “person” either. “Human” starts out as a biological category—it denotes a species, a genetic or ecological category. But species must be connected with morally relevant traits in order to make a moral argument. Otherwise, the appeal to species as such is only another form of prejudice, which some philosophers even call “speciesism,” on analogy to racism and sexism. Some other animals are as self-aware and free as many humans—say, humans in reduced states, but then again, apparently some animals are perceptually much sharper than even normally functioning humans. So if humans are persons and have rights, why don’t those animals?

Certainly a great many animals are more conscious and self-determined than human fetuses, in particular, so for those who want to assert that fetuses have rights, there is a question: How can we justify excluding those animals? Contrariwise, those who want to include many or most animals as persons may also need to include fetuses—or, again, explain what it is that makes the difference.

On the other hand, we may also wonder whether a biological human couldn’t lose human rights, or indeed personhood itself, under certain conditions. What do we mean when we say of a person in an irreversible coma that they have become (not to mince words here) a “vegetable”? A vegetable is a living form, but not one capable of the self-awareness and choice essential to personhood. If such people continue to have rights anyway, what kinds or degrees of rights might they be (sheer life, for example, or maybe just the right to die with dignity)? Is this because once they were persons, rather than because in some way they still are?

Also: can there be such things as partial persons? Fetuses, again, have few of the capacities usually identified as essential to personhood. They are human, we might say, but not yet human beings. Do they gradually *become* persons, then, passing through stages of partial personhood in between, including after birth? At the other end of life, what about dying persons—also partial in some way? And, again what about other animals?

You see, in short, that the Ethics of Persons is not a settled business. (Not surprisingly, neither are any of the other families of moral values.) We continue to be challenged to rethink and perhaps adjust even values as basic as the values of persons themselves: precious but also in some ways unclear and in flux. Such is ethics!



FOR REVIEW

1. Why is treating someone as a person not the same as just being nice to them?
2. How do Buber and Levinas understand the experience of persons?
3. What is a religious understanding of the preciousness of persons?

4. What does Philip Hallie mean by “hospitality”? How does it relate to the value of persons?
5. What seems to have been the conception of persons that motivated the Chambonnais to their moral heroism?
6. What is the first form of Immanuel Kant’s Categorical Imperative?
7. Why shouldn’t we lie to get ourselves out of sticky situations, according to Kant?
8. What are the other forms of the Categorical Imperative? How is that they are equivalent (to each other and to the first form), according to Kant?
9. How do rights defend and define personhood?
10. How does personhood defend and define rights?
11. What is the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights?
12. Illustrate a limit of the Ethics of Persons.
13. What are some of the difficulties of determining who (what kind of being) actually *is* a person?



FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

5.1 QUESTIONS

Can you identify times in your own experience when other persons emerged in the radical, stop-everything kind of way that Buber and Levinas describe? Correspondingly, when do you live mostly in the “I/It” world? What do you think of the balance between the two in your own life?

Likewise, when have you experienced “hospitality” in Hallie’s sense? And when have you offered it? Or put it in Kantian terms, where and how do we tend to treat others as “ends,” and where and how mainly (or entirely?) as “means”? How about how you yourself are treated? When and by whom are you treated in each way? Why?

Why do you think it is sometimes so hard to see other people as persons? Is it something inherent in us, selfishness for example? Is it our language, all too often reducing people to objects to be derided or exploited? Is it our stereotypes? Notice also that when people are reduced to objects in one way or another, the reductions can easily become self-fulfilling prophecies. One of the chief excuses for the enslavement of blacks in America, for example, was that black people were naturally “ignorant and depraved.” But one of the prime effects of slavery was that the slaves were often *made* ignorant and depraved. Slavery wore down and degraded the slave; then this very degradation was blamed on the slaves themselves (it was said to be “their nature”),

thus justifying more slavery and still more degradation. Call this *self-validating reduction*. Can you see similar processes at work today?

5.2 APPLYING THE ETHICS OF THE PERSON

The best way to understand the Ethics of the Person is to put yourself within it and try to use it to think through specific moral questions and issues. Here, for that purpose, are six. Pick two or three that especially interest you, or consider them all if you can. Ask in each case how the Ethics of the Person might answer the questions or orient us toward the issue.

Important: the aim of this exercise is to *explore*, not to arrive at some final, definitive, fully confident answer. Sometimes no such answer may emerge; other times there may be more than one answer, because the different forms of the Ethics of the Person may highlight different aspects of the question or issue or point in varied and different directions. All of this is fine and good. The aim is not to dictate what should be done, but rather to get a better feeling for the Ethics of the Person by trying on some of its forms.

You'll see these questions and issues again: they will repeat across all four of the chapters on families of moral values (chapters 5 through 8). As you return to them in the chapters to follow, then, you should also be increasingly able to compare and contrast the characteristic styles of moral thinking across the general families. Attend to parallels and complementarities as well as seeming conflicts (there will usually be some of both.) If you have to choose only some of these questions and issues to explore, focus on the same questions and issues from the standpoint of each of the four families.

1. ETHICS AT SCHOOL

Moral questions arise in the lives of students. For example, surely the Ethics of Persons has something to say about how you conduct yourself as a student. It requires academic honesty, for example (but why, exactly?), respect for your fellow students as well as your teachers, and the like. How might you set out something like a Student Code of Conduct based on the Ethics of Persons?

Correspondingly, does the Ethics of Persons have anything to say about how colleges and universities themselves are set up and governed? About grading systems? About pedagogy (for example, what is the most moral way to teach?) and the curriculum?

Most generally, has the Ethics of Persons anything to say about the moral value of education itself? Is there a moral obligation to learn (and to teach)? Why or why not? And does the subject of study matter?

2. ETHICS AT WORK

Moral questions arise in our working lives. For example, surely the Ethics of Persons has something to say about how you conduct yourself as a worker. It

requires honest devotion to the job (right?), respect for fellow workers as well as subordinates and superiors, and the like. How might you set out something like a workers' Code of Conduct based on the Ethics of Persons?

Correspondingly, does the Ethics of Persons have anything to say about how work itself is set up in our society? About wages and salaries? About how work and workplaces are organized? Are certain kinds of workplaces more moral than others? If so, why?

Most generally, according to the Ethics of Persons, what is the moral value of work itself? Is there an ethical obligation to work? Why or why not? Does the kind of work matter?

Chapter 4 pointed out that the so-called "work ethic" has been traditionally understood in terms of the Ethics of Virtue. Recently, however, a certain kind of obsessiveness about work, also identified with the work ethic, has increasingly been questioned. Maybe we work (way?) too much? Maybe we too readily accept deadening work as just what work must be like?—that's not necessarily a virtue! What do you think the work ethic is today? What else could, or should, work be like? How could, or should, the Ethics of the Person regard it?

3. DRUGS

According to the Ethics of Persons, what exactly, if anything, is morally wrong with using mind-altering drugs, from marijuana to cocaine, Ecstasy, etc.? For example, what do you think Kant would say? Why? How might he (or you) justify his answer? Do you find it compelling?

Is there any morally relevant difference between these drugs, from the perspective of the Ethics of Persons? (Oh, and should alcohol be included in this categorization? Why or why not?)

Note on terms: many libertarians argue that we have a *right* to use mind-altering drugs (an instance of the general right to do anything, even if it harms ourselves, so long as it does not harm others) but not necessarily that doing so is the right thing to do, in the broader sense of moral sensibility. Rights in this sense are essentially political and legal protections: they secure the freedom within which we may act as we see fit. There still can be moral questions about what is the right thing to do with this freedom.

4. DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

Wealth and income in the United States (and in the world) are distributed in dramatically uneven and unequal ways. For instance, in the United States, the top 1% of households now owns more than the bottom 90% of households combined. At work, the average CEO of a major corporation is paid about \$6,000,000 per year, which is about 160 times what the average American worker (note: by no means the worst-paid in the same corporation) is paid every year (about \$36,000). (For much more data and helpful graphic representations, see <http://inequality.org/resources/>, accessed 12/11/16.)

Does the Ethics of Persons have anything to say about this situation? If persons are all equally precious from a moral point of view, how can a system that produces such inequality be considered moral? What would Kant say? How about the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights? Speaking of rights, though, mightn't inequality—even radical inequality—be a logical consequence of certain kinds of rights? Do we have a right to be *equal*, or only to enough resources to get by at some sort of decent level—or perhaps not even that, but only the right to “pursue” them?

Be aware that **Going Farther #7** will take up these questions in much more detail. Again—as with all of these questions—take the task here to be exploratory, not to arrive at some final or complete answer.

5. OTHER ANIMALS

What does the Ethics of the Person imply for familiar and increasingly pressing questions about other-than-human animals, such as today's moral challenges to the killing and eating of other animals, their use in medical experimentation and general product testing, as well as zoos, hunting, genetic manipulation, pet-keeping, and more? If even some other animals are also persons, mustn't all of these practices have to change dramatically?

Traditionally the Ethics of the Person has been applied only to humans—and, as the text notes, only to some of us. Those conducting the moral discourse congratulate themselves on of course being persons themselves, citizens from birth in the great Kingdom of Ends, while sometimes holding the privilege very tightly indeed, resisting the claims of any “Others” to the same exalted status. Are we so entitled?

Sharp lines have been supposed to divide and distinguish us from everything else in the world. But remember that contemporary philosophers may argue that however we define or determine persons, it is likely that some other-than-human animals will also qualify (and/or possibly not all beings that may be called “human,” either). Drawing justifiable and honestly defensible lines is not easy! Do you think it can be done? Where? Why?

Related questions: In Alice Walker's “Am I Blue?” (Reading 3), do you think that Walker is recognizing Blue as a person? Why or why not? Is this crucial to her moral response to him? In *I and Thou*, Martin Buber often writes about relationships with animals and even trees, though officially he seems to be saying that they are not persons (while insisting that there *can* be other-than-human persons—God, most notably). Emmanuel Levinas writes evocatively of the roots of ethics literally in the Face of the Other. But animals have faces too, don't they? (Or at least most do—is there a morally relevant distinction here?) Though both Buber and Levinas were insistent that ethics does not extend to other animals, more recent philosophers in their tradition haven't been so sure. Some argue for including at least such animals as dolphins, whales, and the great apes.

Levinas writes about a dog who strayed into the Nazi concentration camp where he and his fellow prisoners were daily being treated as less than human, as dirt. Yet every morning the dog greeted them with wagging tail as they were being marched out to work. Every night he barked excitedly for their return. The *dog* at least treated them like human beings—as persons. In a wrenching phrase, Levinas calls that dog “the last Kantian in Nazi Germany.” Can we sometimes learn ethics from other animals, then? And if so, how could they not also count ethically?

6. CLIMATE CHANGE

Does the Ethics of Persons have anything to say about anthropogenic climate change—that is, climate change caused by current and past human activities? Current levels of emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases threaten to alter the climate of the future Earth, potentially in drastic ways. Already major changes are happening, including the displacement of increasing numbers of people who live in low-lying areas upon which rising seas are encroaching, but the scale of future dislocations and disruptions may dwarf anything we have seen yet.

Dramatically worsening the lives of contemporary others is usually considered to be a morally very bad thing. In the tradition of the Ethics of the Person, it might be understood as injustice to those others, or as a rights-violation (but: exactly what rights?), and/or perhaps understood as using those others as means to our own ends (willy-nilly imposing costs on others rather than cleaning up our own acts so that the costs are much lower or don’t exist at all, and/or bearing the costs ourselves since we are, presumably, getting the benefits). Can we say the same sort of thing about dramatically worsening the lives of future generations? Could it too be understood as injustice to them (but: who are they, exactly? does it matter?), or as a rights-violation (though again: exactly what rights?), and/or perhaps understood as using future generations as means to our own ends (willy-nilly imposing costs on them rather than cleaning up our own acts, literally as well as morally, so that the costs are much lower or don’t exist at all, and/or bearing the costs ourselves, since we are, presumably, getting the benefits)? But how would we do that?

In **Going Farther** #18, architect and visionary William McDonough calls this imposition of huge costs upon future generations “intergenerational remote tyranny.” Is it? Remember that the religious traditions are also weighing in on climate change, most notably recently with Pope Francis’s encyclical *Laudato si* as discussed in chapter 3. Are these appeals primarily to some form of an Ethic of Persons?

NOTES

The Ethics of the Person is included in a category that ethical philosophers call “deontology” or “deontological ethics.” Deontological views are not easy

to define in general, at least in a positive way: what really defines them is their shared opposition to so-called “Consequentialist ethics,” in which the consequences or results of an action determine whether it is moral or not. We will explore the primary form of consequentialist ethics—utilitarianism—in the next chapter. Deontologists instead ground morality in more formal or antecedent features of an action such as its intention or its universalizability or its relation to the will of God.

Ethics students should be aware of this terminology, but apart from this note I have not used it in this book, partly because I am trying to use more familiar and less technical language, and partly because, in my view, it is really a negative category: there is little internal unity to “deontological” views considered positively. It might be better just to speak of “non-consequentialist” views, if any general category is needed, and then get right into the particulars. For more on this, consult the entry “Deontological Ethics” at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ethics-deontological/>.

Martin Buber’s *I and Thou*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (Scribner’s, 1970), is cited from pages 69–72 and 59. Emmanuel Levinas’s major work is *Totality and Infinity* (Duquesne, 1969) and is cited from page 50. A good introduction to Levinas’s philosophy is *Ethics and Infinity*, translated by Richard Cohen and published in 1985 by Duquesne University Press. See also Alphonso Lingis, *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (Indiana University Press, 1994).

Philip Hallie’s essay is based on his best-known book, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* (Harper, 1994). For a systematic look at respect for persons in the philosophical tradition, see R. S. Downie and Elizabeth Telfer, *Respect for Persons* (Schocken, 1970). A classic theory of the right, much less formal than Kant’s, is W. D. Ross’s *The Foundations of Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1939).

The first form of Kant’s Categorical Imperative has some resemblance to the Golden Rule, but also is quite different from it in some ways: see chapter 10 for more on this theme. For background reading on Kantian ethics, start with Onora O’Neill, “A Simplified Account of Kant’s Ethics,” which can be found in a variety of sources. You might continue with Marcia Baron’s *Kantian Ethics Almost Without Apology* (Cornell, 1995) and Christine Korsgaard’s *Creating the Kingdom of Ends* (Cambridge, 1996). Other resources and links are listed in “Kant and Deontology” at <http://ethics.sandiego.edu/theories/Kant/index.asp>.

For an exceptionally vigorous introduction to philosophical theories about rights, see Lawrence Becker, “Individual Rights,” and Hugo Bedeau’s essay, “International Human Rights,” both in Tom Regan and Don VanDeveer, eds., *And Justice for All: New Introductory Essays in Philosophy and Public Policy* (Rowman and Allenheld, 1982). Ethics Updates also has a somewhat dated but still quite extensive and useful section called “Rights Theories” at <http://ethics.sandiego.edu/theories/Rights/index.asp>.



GOING FARTHER #5

PORNOGRAPHY AND THE ETHICS OF THE PERSON

Nearly 80 billion porn videos have been viewed per year in recent years on Pornhub, just one of the largest sites. It has been said that 30% of the data transmitted across the entire Internet is porn, although for obvious reasons reliable data are very hard to come by: other sources say it may be “only” 4%–5%. According to a recent study of university students, nearly 90% of young adult men (18–26) and a third of young adult women report using porn at some level, and about two thirds of young men, along with half of young women, reported believing that using porn is morally acceptable. (Carroll, J., Padilla-Walker, L. M., Nelson, L. J., Olson, C. D., Barry, C. N., and Madsen, S. D., “Generation XXX: Pornography Acceptance and Use Among Emerging Adults,” *Journal of Adolescent Research* 23(1): 6–30, January 2008.)

Is it? Pornography is, broadly speaking, the portrayal of sexual acts for the purpose of sexual arousal. This sounds innocent enough, perhaps, and maybe even appealing. But all too often the actual reality of porn is profoundly disturbing. Widespread portrayals show women enjoying or even begging for pain or humiliation or rape; being tied up, tortured, or forced into postures of extreme sexual servility or display; repeatedly hurt, injured, even mutilated; penetrated by objects or animals; and in general presented in scenarios of degradation, injury, or torture, and shown as filthy or inferior in other ways.

These are horrible things to do to anyone, and surely also are deeply troubling things even to imagine doing or picture with actors who are supposedly freely choosing to portray such acts (which by many accounts is often not the case either), especially if the imagining is widespread and indeed the basis of a multi-billion-dollar industry. It isn't just the pain, though surely these acts are painful. Much worse than that, what's portrayed is a violation of the very humanity, autonomy, and selfhood of the people involved—in short, it seems, of their very personhood. Worse still, it may be argued that pornography teaches that this kind of subordination and humiliation, especially of women, is just what sex *is*. Charging degradation with sexual energy, porn makes it appealing. Though there are those who object to sexual portrayals just because they are sexual, a much more urgent concern for moralists, especially in the Ethics of Persons, is the sexualization of these types of degradation and its likely degradation also of the very possibility of gender equity and of genuinely moral or “good” sex.

It is sometimes argued that this kind of porn can be a substitute for such treatment of women, rather than an incitement to treat real women the same way. But this is to suppose that men somehow naturally want to treat women that way, such that they need a “substitute” in the first place, whereas it seems more likely, again, that this kind of pornography often *teaches* such attitudes and self-conceptions in the first place—to, for starters, the 90% of young men who report viewing porn regularly. One could even say that pornography is the main form of sex education in our society at present.

Certainly it is hard to imagine that porn wouldn't at least sometimes affect porn users' behavior. Since at bottom, however nice they have to be to women during the daytime or in today's workplace, users of this kind of pornography are constantly being *shown* that women are really just sexual objects, mere means to the pleasure of the user—or rather, the serious porn “believer” can readily flip into that way of seeing women—and thus it can readily seem that there is nothing problematic with abusing them. Besides, again, this kind of porn reassures such men that women really *want* it, however much they may say NO or scream or plead—and then there is no escape from this fantasy world for either side. Ethics might argue that everyone is diminished as a consequence—and the effects can literally be lethal for some.

RETHINKING OBJECTIFICATION

It is often said that this kind of pornography reduces the women involved to *objects*: to “things,” even to specific body parts. This is “objectification.”

Sexual objectification is not anything new in the culture, of course. A woman just walking down the street may think she is actually a human being, but catcalls or hypersexualized billboards may tell her that she is really just a cute little plaything or a cunt. Online it can be even worse: pornographic cyber-harassment is widespread. Many feminists argue that the pervasive and insistent judgment of women by their appearance is also a form of objectification—and sometimes even as lethal, as when women end up on unsustainable diets in order to achieve a certain impossibly thin look.

Indeed, the active denial of a woman's personhood by objectifying her may be precisely what the viewer finds (or learns to find) stimulating. To treat a thing “like a thing” may or may not be particularly exciting, but to treat a real person like a thing apparently is a turn-on for some people.

But here things also get more complex. Is objectification *always* bad? Surely we do not want to say that any kind of sexual portrayal is automatically ethically problematic, for some portrayals can be quite lovely and loving. Others might be exploratory and liberating in other ways. Morality has a long and arguably unfortunate history of—to put it baldly—sexual prudery. Philosophically, meanwhile, we might even wonder whether a certain kind of objectification is *necessary* in sex. After all, sex is a profoundly bodily experience. The very joy of sex is partly the joy of being an embodied person, and reveling in the embodiment of another. How can the Ethics of Persons both appropriately condemn pornography's degradation of women and yet not end up on the edge of condemning sex itself?

Feminist and other philosophers point out that our ethical traditions as well as religious and philosophical traditions have long devalued the body. Even today we may assume, often without quite realizing it, that persons are somehow entirely separate from bodies. If so, then it's true: any activity or situation in which we are (or are made) essentially bodily is an insult to our personhood. And we actually do seem to think such things—though again not always explicitly or consciously—when it comes not just to sex but also childbirth, disability, physical dependency, illness, and the like. That women have been more closely associated with the body, in many of these ways, is one reason that women as such have been devalued in too many ethical traditions.

Yet in truth our bodies are *part* of our personhood. As contemporary feminist philosopher Ann Cahill argues,

We are not persons *despite* our bodies, and we don't become better persons by denying or controlling our bodies (despite what all those women's magazines say!). We are persons (partly) *because* of our bodies; that is, our embodiment is as vital to our moral status as persons as it is to our experience.

Thus, Cahill reminds us, “not only do lovers use each other’s bodies in order to have a sexual experience, but they often desire their [own] bodies to be used in this way.” The problem with the usual pornography, on Cahill’s view, is not that it “reduces” women to their bodies—all of us are already bodies, in part, and a good thing too—but something rather different: rather, it reduces women to the playthings of men (like . . . “bunnies”—that *Playboy* imagery is no accident), subjected to whatever whims or cruelties may come along, not allowed to act or expected to have desires of their own. Personhood is lost or compromised when women’s selves become *derivative* of men’s or of the viewer’s (Ann Cahill, *Overcoming Objectification: A Carnal Ethics*, Routledge, 2010).

The psychological literature is full of studies of heavy pornography users who are unable to have satisfying sex, or reach sexual climax, any other way. Routine users of pornography have significantly diminished marital satisfaction and difficulty establishing or maintaining close relationships. Surely this is not a surprise. It even seems to follow that if you want a vibrant sex life, you should limit or eradicate your consumption of porn. Yet we are now considering the possibility that there could be a kind of sexually stimulating portrayal that may not be ethically offensive in the way that the usual kind of pornography is. What about when personhood is honored throughout—when all parties are present and respected as persons in their own rights?

There have been attempts to create, or better define, what Gloria Steinem, in Reading #11, calls *erotica*—ethical pornography, so to speak (her term “erotica” is obviously meant in a quite different sense than a catalog of sex toys might use the term). Meanwhile, sexual practices are also shifting. Some people get a charge from play-acting some of the very scenarios—“bondage and submission,” for example—that would be unacceptably objectifying if non-consensual: the difference is (or is argued to be) that the participants freely consent to them in advance, and can stop the action at any moment. Riskier, but to some people more intensely pleasurable, is to remove the last requirement.

Experimentation goes on . . . and sexual practice seems to change faster than ethics. At least, many people seem irresistibly drawn to playing on the edge of sex and personhood, and perhaps that is no surprise. Sex is a vital and wonderful part of life; it is also fraught in a variety of ways, especially in a society so awash in the usual kinds of pornography that virtually sexualize the subordination of women’s personhood; yet it may be (and *should* be!) that ethics, despite its history, may still be able to (help!) guide us toward doing better. *Good sex*, indeed!

READING 11

From “*Erotica vs. Pornography*”

GLORIA STEINEM

GLORIA STEINEM (b. 1934) is a writer and wide-ranging activist who has been central to the American feminist movement since the 1970s. She was one of the founders of *Ms. Magazine* in 1972—back when it was either “Miss” or “Mrs.” for women, and the “Mrs.” usually simply went with the husband’s full name, like “Mrs. John Smith” (talk about “derivatization”!), so that the prefix “Ms.” was unheard of, radical, and controversial. “*Erotica vs. Pornography*” appeared in *Ms.* in 1977 and was subsequently

reprinted in Steinem's collection *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* (Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1983).

"Pornography is not about sex," Steinem argues. "It's about an imbalance of male-female power that allows and even requires sex to be used as a form of aggression." *Erotica* is the word she suggests to differentiate sex from violence and rescue sexual pleasure—again, obviously different from the use of the term *erotica* in popular culture.

Though both *erotica* and pornography refer to verbal or pictorial representations of sexual behavior, they are as different as a room with doors open and one with doors locked. The first might be a home, but the second could only be a prison.

Clarifying that difference is a key task of ethics.

Look at or imagine images of people making love; really making love. Those images may be very diverse. but there is likely to be a mutual pleasure and touch and warmth, an empathy for each other's bodies and nerve endings, a shared sensuality and a spontaneous sense of two people who are there because they want to be.

Now look at or imagine images of sex in which there is force, violence, or symbols of unequal power. They may be very blatant: whips and chains of bondage, even torture and murder presented as sexually titillating, the clear evidence of wounds and bruises, or an adult's power being used sexually over a child. They may be more subtle: the use of class, race, authority, or just body poses to convey conqueror and victim; unequal nudity, with one person's body exposed and vulnerable while the other is armored with clothes; or even a woman by herself, exposed for an unseen but powerful viewer whom she clearly is trying to please. (It's interesting that, even when only the woman is seen, we often know whether she is there for her own pleasure or being displayed for someone else's.) But blatant or subtle, there is no equal power or mutuality. In fact, much of the tension and drama comes from the clear idea that one person is dominating another.

"Erotica and Pornography" from the book OUTRAGEOUS ACTS AND EVERYDAY REBELLIONS by Gloria Steinem. Copyright © 1983 by Gloria Steinem. Copyright © 1984 by East Toledo Productions, Inc. Copyright © 1995 by Gloria Steinem. Reprinted by permission of Henry Holt and Company. All rights reserved.

These two sorts of images are as different as love is from rape, as dignity is from humiliation, as partnership is from slavery, as pleasure is from pain. Yet they are confused and lumped together as “pornography” or “obscenity,” “erotica” or “explicit sex,” because sex and violence are so dangerously intertwined and confused. After all, it takes violence or the threat of it to maintain the unearned dominance of any group of human beings over another. Moreover, the threat must be the most persuasive wherever men and women come together intimately and are most in danger of recognizing each other’s humanity.

The confusion of sex with violence is most obvious in any form of sadomasochism. The gender-based barrier to empathy has become so great that a torturer or even murderer may actually believe pain or loss of life to be the natural fate of the victim; and the victim may have been so deprived of self-respect or of empathetic human contact that she expects pain or loss of freedom as the price of any intimacy or attention at all. It’s unlikely that even a masochist expects death. Nonetheless, “snuff” movies and much current pornographic literature insist that a slow death from sexual torture is the final orgasm and ultimate pleasure. It’s a form of “suicide” reserved for women. Though men, in fact, are far more likely to kill themselves, male suicide is almost never presented as sexually pleasurable. But sex is also confused with violence and aggression in all forms of popular culture, and in respectable theories of psychology and sexual behavior as well. The idea that aggression is a “normal” part of male sexuality, and that passivity or even the need for male aggression is a “normal” part of female sexuality, are part of the male-dominant culture we live in, the books we learn from, and the air we breathe.

Even the words we are given to express our feelings are suffused with the same assumptions. Sexual phrases are the most common synonyms for conquering and humiliation (being had, being screwed, getting fucked); the sexually aggressive woman is a slut or a nymphomaniac, but the sexually aggressive man is just normal; and real or scientific descriptions of sex may perpetuate the same roles, for instance, a woman is always penetrated by a man though she might also be said to have enveloped him. . . .

“Pornography” comes from the Greek root *porne* (harlot, prostitute, or female captive) and *graphos* (writing about or description of). Thus, it means a description of either the purchase of sex, which implies an imbalance of power in itself, or sexual slavery.

This definition includes, and should include, all such degradation, regardless of whether it is females who are the slaves and

males who are the captors or vice versa. There is certainly homosexual pornography, for instance, with a man in the “feminine” role of victim. There is also role-reversal pornography, with a woman whipping or punishing a man, though it’s significant that this genre is created by men for their own pleasure, not by or for women, and allows men to pretend to be victims—but without real danger. There could also be lesbian pornography, with a woman assuming the “masculine” role of victimizing another woman. That women rarely choose this role of victimizer is due to no biological superiority, but a culture that doesn’t addict women to violence. But whatever the gender of the participants, all pornography is an imitation of the male-female, conqueror-victim paradigm, and almost all of it actually portrays or implies enslaved woman and master. . . .

In short, pornography is not about sex. It’s about an imbalance of male-female power that allows and even requires sex to be used as a form of aggression. *Erotica* may be the word that can differentiate sex from violence and rescue sexual pleasure. It comes from the Greek root *eros* (sexual desire or passionate love, named for Eros, the son of Aphrodite), and so contains the idea of love, positive choice, and the yearning for a particular person. Unlike pornography’s reference to a harlot, or prostitute, erotica leaves entirely open the question of gender. (In fact, we may owe its sense of shared power to the Greek idea that a man’s love for another man was more worthy than love for a woman, but at least that bias isn’t present in the word.) Though both erotica and pornography refer to verbal or pictorial representations of sexual behavior, they are as different as a room with doors open and one with doors locked. The first might be a home, but the second could only be a prison.

The problem is that there is so little erotica. Women have rarely been free enough to pursue erotic pleasure in our own lives, much less to create it in the worlds of film, magazines, art, books, television, and popular culture—all the areas of communication we rarely control. Very few male authors and filmmakers have been able to escape society’s message of what a man should do, much less to imagine their way into the identity of a woman. Some women and men are trying to portray equal and erotic sex, but it is still not a part of popular culture.

And the problem is there is so much pornography. This underground stream of anti-woman propaganda that exists in all male-dominant societies has now become a flood in our streets and theaters and even our homes. Perhaps that’s better in the long run. Women can no longer pretend pornography does not exist. We must either face our own humiliation and torture every day

on magazine covers and television screens or fight back. There is hardly a newsstand without women's bodies in chains and bondage, in full labial display for the conquering male viewer, bruised, or on our knees, screaming in real or pretended pain, pretending to enjoy what we don't enjoy. The same images are in mainstream movie theaters and respectable hotel rooms via closed-circuit TV for the traveling businessman. They are brought into our own homes not only in magazines, but in the new form of video cassettes. Even video games offer such features as a smiling, rope-bound woman and a male figure with an erection, the game's object being to rape the woman as many times as possible. (Like much of pornography, that game is fascist on racial grounds as well as sexual ones. The smiling woman is an Indian maiden, the rapist is General Custer, and the game is called "Custer's Revenge.") *[This game was widely condemned and finally withdrawn from the market, though not before 80,000 copies were sold. In 2010 it was listed as one of the most racist video games in history.—AW]* Though "snuff" movies in which real women were eviscerated and finally killed have been driven underground (in part because the graves of many murdered women were discovered around the shack of just one filmmaker in California), movies that simulate the torture murders of women are still going strong. (Snuff is the porn term for killing a woman for sexual pleasure. There is not even the seriousness of a word like murder.) So are the "kiddie porn" or "chicken porn" movies and magazines that show adult men undressing, fondling, and sexually using children; often with the titillating theme that "fathers" are raping "daughters." Some "chicken porn" magazines offer explicit tips on how to use a child sexually without leaving physical evidence of rape, the premise being that children's testimony is even less likely to be believed than that of adult women. . . .

If Nazi propaganda that justified the torture and killing of Jews were the theme of half of our most popular movies and magazines, would we not be outraged? If Ku Klux Klan propaganda that preached and even glamorized the enslavement of blacks were the subject of much-praised "classic" novels, would we not protest? We know that such racist propaganda precedes and justifies the racist acts of pogroms and lynchings. We know that watching a violent film causes test subjects to both condone more violence afterward and to be willing to perpetuate it themselves. Why is the propaganda of sexual aggression against women of all races the one form in which the "conventional wisdom" sees no danger? Why is pornography the only media violence that is supposed to be a "safety valve" to satisfy men's "natural" aggressiveness somewhere short of acting it out? . . .

Feminist groups are not arguing for censorship of pornography, or for censorship of Nazi literature or racist propaganda of the Ku Klux Klan. For one thing, any societal definition of pornography in a male-dominant society (or of racist literature in a racist society) probably would punish the wrong people. Freely-chosen homosexual expression might be considered more “pornographic” than snuff movies, or contraceptive courses for teenagers more “obscene” than bondage. Furthermore, censorship in itself, even with the proper definitions, would only drive pornography into more underground activity and, were it to follow the pattern of drug traffic, into even more profitability. Most important, the First Amendment is part of a statement of individual rights against government intervention that feminism seeks to expand, not contract: for instance, a woman’s right to decide whether and when to have children. When we protest against pornography and educate others about it, as I am doing now, we are strengthening the First Amendment by exercising it. . . .

But we now have words to describe our outrage and separate sex from violence. We now have the courage to demonstrate publicly against pornography, to keep its magazines and films out of our houses, to boycott its purveyors, to treat even friends and family members who support it as seriously as we would treat someone who supported and enjoyed Nazi literature or the teachings of the Klan. But until we finally untangle sexuality and aggression, there will be more pornography and less erotica. There will be little murders in our beds—and very little love.



GOING FARTHER #6

INSIDE RACISM TODAY

It might be possible to read Reading 1 and hope that the kind of automatic and unthinking racism with which C. P. Ellis began is much less widespread and fading away today, almost two decades into the 21st century. After all, Ellis was speaking of the 1960s—nearly sixty years go now.

Alas, though, read contemporary writer Ta-Nehisi Coates's work and you quickly realize that there is a very long way to go. A profound and visceral racism is very much alive today, and it is rooted in a past that, according to Coates, white America has still not faced—in fact is deeply invested in not facing. Everywhere and constantly the legacy is felt, at the time of this writing most vividly in the deeply disturbing pattern of deaths of black men at the hands of police officers during what they consider routine searches or arrests, protested now by a vigorous and angry movement named for the basic ethical assertion that *Black Lives Matter*.

All Lives Matter is sometimes the response, and no ethical person would deny this. But—the response in turn—*all* lives are not at stake in the way that black lives are today. And, Coates argues, this is nothing new. Writing as a black person and for another black person—his own son—Coates shows all of us how enormous the consequences of America's bitter racially-divided past remain for the people who already, every day and unavoidably, face it, so to say, in the mirror.

Coates does not claim to have answers. Sometimes he wants to say simply that the struggle against all of this itself is the point. His advice to his son is loving but hard. Then again, at other times, he glories in the vigor and variety of black culture and history itself, for example at its few Meccas in America—specifically, for him, Washington's Howard University—and finds there a stirring respite from the disrespect and dismissal widespread in the culture at large. Yet in the end what sticks most strongly in the mind is the image of his son weeping in his room after listening to the nightly news, and the routine racism that Coates and his son encounter around the city.

As the slogan goes, another world is surely possible. Ethics must insist and then insist even more strongly that we move resolutely in that direction. But how can we get there? And—all of us?

READING 12

Selections from “A Letter to My Son”

TA-NEHISI COATES

TA-NEHISI COATES (b. 1975) is a widely read and admired American writer and educator and national correspondent for *The*

Atlantic, where he writes on a wide range of social and cultural themes, especially as they relate to the African-American community. This reading is a selection from Coates's 2016 essay in *The Atlantic* called "A Letter to My Son," which follows upon his recent *New York Times*-list bestseller *Between the World and Me* (Spiegel and Grau, 2015).

. . . [A]ll our phrasing—*race relations*, *racial chasm*, *racial justice*, *racial profiling*, *white privilege*, even *white supremacy*—serves to obscure that racism is a visceral experience, that it dislodges brains, blocks airways, rips muscle, extracts organs, cracks bones, breaks teeth. You must never look away from this. You must always remember that the sociology, the history, the economics, the graphs, the charts, the regressions all land, with great violence, upon the body. And should one live in such a body? What should be our aim beyond meager survival of constant, generational, ongoing battery and assault? I have asked this question all my life. I have sought the answer through my reading and writings, through the music of my youth, through arguments with your grandfather, with your mother. I have searched for answers in nationalist myth, in classrooms, out on the streets, and on other continents. The question is unanswerable, which is not to say futile. The greatest reward of this constant interrogation, of confrontation with the brutality of my country, is that it has freed me from ghosts and myths. . . .

At the onset of the Civil War, our stolen bodies were worth \$4 billion, more than all of American industry, all of American railroads, workshops, and factories combined, and the prime product rendered by our stolen bodies—cotton—was America's primary export. The richest men in America lived in the Mississippi River Valley, and they made their riches off our stolen bodies. Our bodies were held in bondage by the early presidents. Our bodies were traded from the White House by James K. Polk. Our bodies built the Capitol and the National Mall. The first shot of the Civil War was fired in South Carolina, where our bodies constituted the majority of human bodies in the state. Here is the motive for the great war. It's not a secret. But we can do better and find the bandit confessing his crime. "Our position is thoroughly identified with the institution of slavery," declared Mississippi as it left the Union, "the greatest material interest of the world."

But American reunion was built on a comfortable narrative that made enslavement into benevolence, white knights of body snatchers, and the mass slaughter of the war into a kind of sport in which one could conclude that both sides conducted their affairs with courage, honor, and élan. This lie of the Civil War is the lie of innocence, is the Dream. Historians conjured the Dream. Hollywood fortified the Dream. The Dream was gilded by novels and adventure stories. . . I, like every kid I knew, loved *The Dukes of Hazzard*. But I would have done well to think more about why two outlaws, driving a car named the General Lee, must necessarily be portrayed as “just some good ole boys, never meanin’ no harm”—a mantra for the Dreamers if there ever was one. But what one “means” is neither important nor relevant. It is not necessary that you believe that the officer who choked Eric Garner [*black Staten Islander who died after being put into a chokehold by a NYPD police officer who had arrested him on suspicion of selling cigarettes without tax stamps; his death and the later exoneration of the officers involved sparked demonstrations nationwide*—AW] set out that day to destroy a body. All you need to understand is that the officer carries with him the power of the American state and the weight of an American legacy, and they necessitate that of the bodies destroyed every year, some wild and disproportionate number of them will be black.

Here is what I would like for you to know: In America, it is traditional to destroy the black body—it is heritage. Enslavement was not merely the antiseptic borrowing of labor—it is not so easy to get a human being to commit their body against its own elemental interest. And so enslavement must be casual wrath and random manglings, the gashing of heads and brains blown out over the river as the body seeks to escape. It must be rape so regular as to be industrial. There is no uplifting way to say this. I have no praise anthems, nor old Negro spirituals. The spirit and soul are the body and brain, which are destructible—that is precisely why they are so precious. And the soul did not escape. The spirit did not steal away on gospel wings. The soul was the body that fed the tobacco, and the spirit was the blood that watered the cotton, and these created the first fruits of the American garden. And the fruits were secured through the bashing of children with stovewood, through hot iron peeling skin away like husk from corn.

It had to be blood. It had to be the thrashing of kitchen hands for the crime of churning butter at a leisurely clip. It had to be some woman “chear’d . . . with thirty lashes a Saturday last and as many more a Tuesday again.” It could only be the employment of carriage whips, tongs, iron pokers, handsaws, stones, paperweights, or whatever might be handy to break the black body, the

black family, the black community, the black nation. The bodies were pulverized into stock and marked with insurance. And the bodies were an aspiration, lucrative as Indian land, a veranda, a beautiful wife, or a summer home in the mountains. For the men who needed to believe themselves white, the bodies were the key to a social club, and the right to break the bodies was the mark of civilization. "The two great divisions of society are not the rich and poor, but white and black," said the great South Carolina senator John C. Calhoun. "And all the former, the poor as well as the rich, belong to the upper class, and are respected and treated as equals." And there it is—the right to break the black body as the meaning of their sacred equality. And that right has always given them meaning, has always meant that there was someone down in the valley because a mountain is not a mountain if there is nothing below.

The terrible truth is that we cannot will ourselves to an escape on our own.

You and I, my son, are that "below." That was true in 1776. It is true today. . . . But still you must struggle. The Struggle is in your name, Samori—you were named for Samori Touré, who struggled against French colonizers for the right to his own black body. He died in captivity, but the profits of that struggle and others like it are ours, even when the object of our struggle, as is so often true, escapes our grasp. . . .

Perhaps struggle is all we have. . . . That wisdom is not unique to our people, but I think it has special meaning to those of us born out of mass rape, whose ancestors were carried off and divided up into policies and stocks. I have raised you to respect every human being as singular, and you must extend that same respect into the past. Slavery is not an indefinable mass of flesh. It is a particular, specific enslaved woman, whose mind is as active as your own, whose range of feeling is as vast as your own; who prefers the way the light falls in one particular spot in the woods, who enjoys fishing where the water eddies in a nearby stream, who loves her mother in her own complicated way, thinks her sister talks too loud, has a favorite cousin, a favorite season, who excels at dressmaking and knows, inside herself, that she is as intelligent and capable as anyone. "Slavery" is this same woman born in a world that loudly proclaims its love of freedom and inscribes this love in its essential texts, a world in which these same professors hold this woman a slave, hold her mother a slave, her father a slave, her daughter a slave, and when this woman peers back into the generations all she sees is the enslaved. She can hope for more. She can imagine some future for her grandchildren. But when she dies, the world—which is really the only world she can ever know—ends. For this woman,

enslavement is not a parable. It is damnation. It is the never-ending night. And the length of that night is most of our history. Never forget that we were enslaved in this country longer than we have been free. Never forget that for 250 years black people were born into chains—whole generations followed by more generations who knew nothing but chains.

You must struggle to truly remember this past. You must resist the common urge toward the comforting narrative of divine law, toward fairy tales that imply some irrepressible justice. The enslaved were not bricks in your road, and their lives were not chapters in your redemptive history. They were people turned to fuel for the American machine. Enslavement was not destined to end, and it is wrong to claim our present circumstance—no matter how improved—as the redemption for the lives of people who never asked for the posthumous, untouchable glory of dying for their children. Our triumphs can never redeem this. Perhaps our triumphs are not even the point. Perhaps struggle is all we have. So you must wake up every morning knowing that no natural promise is unbreakable, least of all the promise of waking up at all. This is not despair. These are the preferences of the universe itself: verbs over nouns, actions over states, struggle over hope.

The birth of a better world is not ultimately up to you, though I know, each day, there are grown men and women who tell you otherwise. I am not a cynic. I love you, and I love the world, and I love it more with every new inch I discover. But you are a black boy, and you must be responsible for your body in a way that other boys cannot know. Indeed, you must be responsible for the worst actions of other black bodies, which, somehow, will always be assigned to you. And you must be responsible for the bodies of the powerful—the policeman who cracks you with a nightstick will quickly find his excuse in your furtive movements. You have to make your peace with the chaos, but you cannot lie. You cannot forget how much they took from us and how they transfigured our very bodies into sugar, tobacco, cotton, and gold.

Perhaps you remember that time we went to see *Howl's Moving Castle* on the Upper West Side. You were almost 5 years old. The theater was crowded, and when we came out we rode a set of escalators down to the ground floor. As we came off, you were moving at the dawdling speed of a small child. A white woman pushed you and said, "Come on!" Many things now happened at once. There was the reaction of any parent when a stranger puts a hand on the body of their child. And there was my own insecurity in my ability to protect your black body. And more: There was my sense that this woman was pulling rank. I knew, for instance, that she would

not have pushed a black child out on my part of Flatbush, because she would be afraid there and would sense, if not know, that there would be a penalty for such an action.

But I was not out on my part of Flatbush. And I was not in West Baltimore. I forgot all of that. I was only aware that someone had invoked their right over the body of my son. I turned and spoke to this woman, and my words were hot with all of the moment and all of my history. She shrank back, shocked. A white man standing nearby spoke up in her defense. I experienced this as his attempt to rescue the damsel from the beast. He had made no such attempt on behalf of my son. And he was now supported by other white people in the assembling crowd. The man came closer. He grew louder. I pushed him away. He said, "I could have you arrested!" I did not care. I told him this, and the desire to do much more was hot in my throat. This desire was only controllable because I remembered someone standing off to the side there, bearing witness to more fury than he had ever seen from me—you.

I came home shook. It was a mix of shame for having gone back to the law of the streets, and rage—"I could have you arrested!" Which is to say: "I could take your body."

I have told this story many times, not out of bravado, but out of a need for absolution. But more than any shame I felt, my greatest regret was that in seeking to defend you I was, in fact, endangering you.

"I could have you arrested," he said. Which is to say: "One of your son's earliest memories will be watching the men who sodomized Abner Louima and choked Anthony Baez cuff, club, tase, and break you." I had forgotten the rules, an error as dangerous on the Upper West Side of Manhattan as on the West Side of Baltimore. One must be without error out here. Walk in single file. Work quietly. Pack an extra No. 2 pencil. Make no mistakes.

But you are human and you will make mistakes. You will misjudge. You will yell. You will drink too much. You will hang out with people whom you shouldn't. Not all of us can always be Jackie Robinson—not even Jackie Robinson was always Jackie Robinson. But the price of error is higher for you than it is for your countrymen, and so that America might justify itself, the story of a black body's destruction must always begin with his or her error, real or imagined—with Eric Garner's anger, with Trayvon Martin's mythical words ("You are gonna die tonight"), with Sean Bell's mistake of running with the wrong crowd, with me standing too close to the small-eyed boy pulling out. . .

I never wanted you to be twice as good as them, so much as I have always wanted you to attack every day of your brief bright life determined to struggle.

I am sorry that I cannot make it okay. I am sorry that I cannot save you—but not that sorry. Part of me thinks that your very vulnerability brings you closer to the meaning of life, just as for others, the quest to believe oneself white divides them from it. The fact is that despite their dreams, their lives are also not inviolable. When their own vulnerability becomes real—when the police decide that tactics intended for the ghetto should enjoy wider usage, when their armed society shoots down their children, when nature sends hurricanes against their cities—they are shocked by the rages of logic and the natural world in a way that those of us who were born and bred to understand cause and effect can never be. And I would not have you live like them. You have been cast into a race in which the wind is always at your face and the hounds are always at your heels. And to varying degrees this is true of all life. The difference is that you do not have the privilege of living in ignorance of this essential fact.

I am speaking to you as I always have—treating you as the sober and serious man I have always wanted you to be, who does not apologize for his human feelings, who does not make excuses for his height, his long arms, his beautiful smile. You are growing into consciousness, and my wish for you is that you feel no need to constrict yourself to make other people comfortable. None of that can change the math anyway. I never wanted you to be twice as good as them, so much as I have always wanted you to attack every day of your brief bright life determined to struggle. The people who must believe they are white can never be your measuring stick. I would not have you descend into your own dream. I would have you be a conscious citizen of this terrible and beautiful world.



The Ethics of Happiness

Chapter 4 outlined the family of happiness-centered values like this:

H A P P I N E S S

The Ethics of Happiness challenges us to achieve the greatest balance of happiness (well-being, satisfaction, pleasure) over suffering. Include in the great calculation the happiness of others as well as oneself, and we find ourselves looking to achieve the greatest balance of happiness over suffering in society as a whole. Ethical thinking in this family of values is quantitative and economic, concerned with trade-offs and the distribution of goods, maximizing tangible social benefits.

Let us now explore the Ethics of Happiness in more detail.

HAPPINESS

A great deal of what we do is obviously not for its own sake but for the sake of something else. We go to the dentist, even though it's nobody's idea of a fun afternoon, to keep our teeth in shape. We fight the rush hour traffic to get home or to work, the pool or the grocery store.

Even these goals in turn don't seem "final," though. We don't really keep our teeth in shape for its own sake (come on, flossing?). And getting to work or the pool or the store—what's the point?

We know why: we want good jobs, healthy teeth and bodies, and some level of physical comfort and ease. But again, why do we want *these* things? These may not exactly be final goals either. But then, what is?

The natural answer is unsurprising, everyday, even "obvious" to many people. Our ultimate goal, we say, is to be happy. Happiness is the "final end" of human action. That is why we want everything else that we seek.

This is a strong claim—stronger than it might seem at first. It is actually a rough psychological theory: a systematic account of human motivation. More than anything else, we are saying, people seek happiness—and, correspondingly, in the end, what we try to avoid is unhappiness: pain and suffering. In terms of values, we value happiness as a basic and inclusive goal, and everything else is valued insofar as it serves happiness. What we disvalue, we disvalue in the end because it impedes or counteracts happiness.

THE QUESTION OF PLEASURE

We must be careful, however, to clarify the relation of this claim about happiness to the more specific and perhaps familiar claim that the final end of human action is specifically *pleasure*.

“Pleasure” usually suggests a more immediate kind of satisfaction or gratification, most often of the senses. It seems fairly clear, though, that people do all sorts of things that are not for the sake of pleasure in this sense. Almost every great endeavor, in art or politics or science or even family raising, let alone exploratory or military, tends to decrease, not increase, the pleasure (in a strict sense, anyway) of the people who undertake them at least in the short run but often in the long run too. Moreover, for this and other reasons the moral tradition tends to suspect that the pursuit of pleasure makes us grasping and self-centered. The gratification of the senses is important, obviously, but it is much less than the whole story.

Philosophers who nonetheless advocate a pleasure-based ethics therefore typically broaden their notion of “pleasure” in the direction of what we have been calling “happiness.” There is no reason that all pleasures must be intense, they say, or just sensual, or that more such pleasures should be our primary goal. Though popularly the term “hedonist” tends to suggest a self-seeking and shallow person, notably preoccupied with sex and maybe a few other sensual gratifications, the ancient philosophical hedonists had (mostly) a bigger picture in mind. The Epicureans, for example (a Greek school of philosophy of the 3rd century BCE—not a kind of gourmet), actually recommended only the most modest pleasures. Epicurus himself, the founder and namesake, virtually advocated asceticism. The best way to be happy, he said, was to live a simple life and reduce pains as much as possible. We’re not built to take too much intensity. For a sustainable life of pleasures—not blazing out too quickly and spending the rest of our lives unhappily regretting it—something fairly quiet is best.

Even when intense pleasure is sought and celebrated, there is not necessarily anything crude or shallow about it. The popular notion of hedonism, it might be argued, actually sells pleasure short. The greatest pleasures of our lives often are associated with the greatest effort and sustained activity. Think of an athlete at the peak of exertion, or a sculptor struggling month after month to bring a masterpiece forth from a block of stone. The greatest

pleasures also often may gain their intensity from their setting and context: sex in the context of love, for example. Mastery of skill, intensity of effort, context and meaning: the pleasure comes from the depth of it all.

If we are careful, then, we can continue to use the word “pleasure,” in a broad sense, for the positive kind of experience we picture as a basic, ultimately good thing, and the goal for which we seek most other things along the way. Or “happiness,” if you prefer. That such a goal exists is the main thing, and, as we’ll soon see, it is the starting point for a modern ethical philosophy.

READING 13

From *Positivity*

BARBARA FREDERICKSON

BARBARA FREDERICKSON (b. 1964) is a social psychologist and professor at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill. She is one of the founders of the “positive psychology” movement that focuses on happiness and positive states of mind, rather than on the various kinds of pathology and *unhappiness* more usually studied in recent psychology.

Science tells us, Frederickson says, that happiness is not a static condition, but an active process. It comes from meeting challenges and growing and opening as a person, rather than sitting back and passively responding to what the world may (or may not) have to offer. Frederickson also explores the surprisingly puzzling question of why we have positive emotions in the first place. Negative emotions like fear and anger clearly have survival value: they motivate “flight or fight.” But what good are positive emotions? Frederickson offers an alternative theory of why they evolved: they serve growth and adaptation in a longer-term way. Happiness serves survival and growth both as individuals and as a species.

Notice, though, that however much happiness has its evolutionary and personal uses, it’s still happiness itself that is the key thing for hedonism. Maybe in evolutionary terms happiness serves survival, but in ethical terms, survival serves happiness!

“Positivity: Means Not Ends” from *POSITIVITY: GROUNDBREAKING RESEARCH REVEALS HOW TO EMBRACE THE HIDDEN STRENGTH OF POSITIVE EMOTIONS, OVERCOME NEGATIVITY, AND THRIVE* by Barbara Fredrickson, copyright © 2009 by Barbara Fredrickson, Ph.D. Used by permission of Crown Books, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

Among our birthrights as humans is the experience of the . . . pleasant feelings of positivity. It comes in many forms and flavors. Think of the times you feel connected to others and loved; when you feel playful, creative, or silly; when you feel blessed and at one with your surroundings; when your soul is stirred by the sheer beauty of existence; or when you feel energized and excited by a new idea or hobby. Positivity reigns whenever positive emotions—like love, joy, gratitude, serenity, interest, and inspiration—touch and open your heart.

Whether it's fascination, laughter, or love, your moments of heart-felt positivity don't last long. Good feelings come and go, much like perfect weather. It's the way we humans were designed. Positivity fades. If it didn't, you'd have a hard time reacting to change. If positivity were permanent, you wouldn't notice the difference between good news and bad news, or between an invitation and an insult.

If you want to reshape your life for the better, the secret is not to grasp positivity too firmly, denying its transient nature. Rather, it's to seed more of it into your life—to increase your *quantity* of positivity over time. . . .

People get pulled into a downward spiral fueled by negativity. Their behavior becomes painfully predictable—even rigid. They feel burdened—at times even lifeless. Yet with a higher ratio of positivity to negativity, people seem to take off, drawn along an upward spiral energized by positivity. Their behavior becomes less predictable and more creative. They grow. They feel uplifted and alive.

Downward spiral or upward spiral. As I see it, that's your choice. However much we resist acknowledging it, we humans are not static. We're either on a positive trajectory or a negative one. Either we're growing in goodness, becoming more creative and resilient, or we're solidifying our bad habits, becoming more stagnant and rigid. No matter how much we may want to keep things as they are, or envision our life goals as a perfect snapshot we can one day frame and preserve, time moves on. How you'll move with it is up to you.

WHY DID POSITIVE EMOTIONS EVOLVE?

. . . Past scientists tried to answer the riddle of positive emotions by resting on the assumption that all emotions, both negative and positive, were consequential to our human ancestors because they produced urges to act in particular ways. Scientists say that emotions trigger *specific action tendencies*. Fear is linked with the urge to flee, anger with the urge to attack, disgust with the urge to expel, and so on.

A core idea nestled within this concept is that having these particular actions spring to mind when our ancestors felt a particular emotion is what made emotions consequential to our species. These were the actions that worked best in getting them out of life-or-death situations that occurred time and again. In other words, those who ran when they spotted the big hunter cats survived. Those who didn't were eaten. Surviving was key, because if an early human did not live long enough to have children, he or she didn't become part of our ancestral family tree.

Another core idea is that specific action tendencies "embody" emotions. Just as these urges overtake our conscious thought, they simultaneously trigger rapid changes in our bodies to support those actions. Stop for a moment to imagine a clear and immediate danger. Maybe an oncoming car is out of control and speeding toward you. Maybe you're in a long bank line and a group of armed masked men enter and chain the door. In any case, when you see danger looming, you not only experience an overwhelming urge to flee to safety, but within milliseconds your cardiovascular system switches gears to redirect oxygenated blood to your large muscles so you'll be prepared to run away. Your adrenal glands also release a surge of cortisol to mobilize more energy by increasing the glucose in your bloodstream. The urge to flee that comes with fear doesn't simply roll around in your head. It infuses your whole body, your entire being.

The concept of specific action tendencies made two important scientific contributions. First, to the extent that these urges helped our ancestors act quickly and decisively in life-threatening circumstances, it explained how the forces of natural selection shaped and preserved emotions as part of our universal human nature. Second, it explained why emotions could infuse both mind and body by orchestrating a cascade of physiological changes.

Within the science of emotions, the value added by the concept of specific action tendencies was huge. It's no wonder that scientists were wedded to it. The trouble came when scientists tried to pinpoint the specific action tendencies for positive emotions. One scientist linked joy with the urge to *do anything*. Others linked serenity with the urge to *do nothing*. These urges aren't nearly as specific as fight, flee, or spit. What's more, the physiological changes that come with positive emotions seem like nothing compared with those linked with negative emotions. Positive emotions simply didn't fit the theoretical mold that worked so well to explain the value of negative emotions. Given these observations, the question *What good are positive emotions?* provoked considerable scientific curiosity.

THE NEW VIEW: POSITIVITY BROADENS AND BUILDS

Working with this brain-teaser, together with other intriguing features of positivity, in the late 1990s I created the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions to answer the riddle of positive emotions.

. . . I proposed that, unlike negative emotions, which narrow people's ideas about possible actions, positive emotions do the opposite: They *broaden* people's ideas about possible actions, opening our awareness to a wider range of thoughts and actions than is typical. Joy, for instance, sparks the urge to play and be creative. Interest sparks the urge to explore and learn, whereas serenity sparks the urge to savor our current circumstances and integrate them into a new view of ourselves and the world around us.

Positivity opens us. The first core truth about positive emotions is that they open our hearts and our minds, making us more receptive and more creative.

Another assumption I challenged was the hidden belief that if emotions held value for our human ancestors, it was because those emotions changed their behaviors in ways that—in the emotional moment—changed their odds of survival or reproduction. While it's easy to imagine how fleeing in fear could save someone's life, it's harder to imagine how playing in joy might do so. To make sense of this, I had to look beyond the moment and identify benefits not located in the present.

What I eventually concluded was that positive and negative emotions mattered on different time scales. Whereas the narrowed mindsets sparked by negative emotions were valuable in instances that threatened our ancestors' survival in some way, the broadened mindsets sparked by positive emotions were valuable to our ancestors in different ways and over longer time scales. Broadened mindsets mattered because—over time—such expansive awareness served to *build* our human ancestors' resources, spurring on their development of assets, abilities, and useful traits. These new resources functioned as reserves, better equipping our ancestors to handle later threats to survival, which of course were inevitable.

Let me tell you about patas monkeys. Like humans and many other mammals, when these monkeys are young, they play chase. Yet their game of chase has a twist. They run headlong into a flexible sapling or bush to catapult themselves in an unexpected direction. If you close your eyes and picture this stunt, you'll see that it would defy getting "caught." It turns out that adults of this species never pull this stunt themselves. Never, that is, unless they need to escape a predator. In play, patas monkeys develop a particular physical skill that might one day save their lives.

Likewise, we've all heard the phrase "the family that plays together, stays together." The wisdom in this phrase is that social play builds ties between people that are lasting and consequential. This wisdom holds outside the human family circle as well. A fascinating example comes from a certain breed of ground squirrels. Like some other mammals, when one squirrel sees a predator in the distance, it will sound an alarm call that alerts other squirrels to run for cover. It's a risky move. In crying out, the danger-spotting squirrel draws attention to itself, which may well attract the predator. Scientists used to think that animals would risk their lives like this only for kin with whom they shared common genes. New evidence suggests, however, that squirrels also sound alarm calls for former playmates, not genetically related. These squirrels developed a social resource while playing—and these buddies will put their lives on the line to save their playmates.

To illustrate resource-building with a different form of positivity, envision the intense pull you feel when you're keenly interested in a new person, place, or thing. Your mindset is open and curious. It draws you out to explore. Scientists have shown that because positive and open mindsets produce exploration and experiential learning, they also come to produce more-accurate mental maps of the world. This means that, relative to times when you feel negative and rejecting (or even neutral), you learn more when you feel upbeat and interested and are acting on your curiosity. That's because negativity—and even neutrality—holds you back. Negativity and neutrality constrain your experience of the world. In consequence, they also constrain your knowledge of the world. Positivity does just the opposite. It draws you out to explore, to mix it up with the world in unexpected ways. Each time you do, you learn something. These gains in knowledge might not be revelatory today, but they'll be useful down the road. And under certain circumstances they may be life-savers.

Positivity transformed early humans for the better, leaving them with extra measures of physical, social, intellectual, and psychological resources. The sparkle of good feelings enticed early humans to broaden and build when they felt safe and satisfied. Those who gave in to this pull became better prepared to survive future threats to life and limb. Those who didn't fared less well. Over millennia, natural selection sculpted our ancestors' capacity to experience heartfelt positivity, creating the form and function of the positive emotions that we modern-day humans experience.

UTILITARIANISM

Happiness is certainly *one* of our basic values. There is no debating the value of positive states of mind: satisfaction, flourishing, the relief of pain and suffering, and pleasures in many senses. These are good and worthy goals, at least as long as they don't turn too shallow or self-centered. As Frederickson points out, they are broadly shared with other animals and adapt us well to the natural and social worlds. You'd never catch Kant saying such a thing, but from a more naturalistic perspective this is just how things should be. Ethics does not live in some other world, but in *this* one.

The Ethics of Happiness, however, goes much further. In the hands of certain philosophers, the rather relaxed and rough-and-ready concern with happiness, as we have so far been sketching it, becomes something much more far-reaching: it actually becomes a *theory* of ethics. Indeed, it can become so systematic that the result, the theory or family of theories known as "utilitarian," pretty much defines what an ethical theory as such is now expected to look like and the questions it is expected to answer.

THE ARGUMENT BEGINS

Three basic steps, each of them arguably very plausible, lead us from our basic claims about happiness to a utilitarian ethical theory.

One step we have practically made already. We have said that happiness is one of the main ultimate aims of human action. In truth, though, isn't it *the* ultimate aim of human action? Don't we want *everything* else, in the end, for the sake of the happiness it brings or the suffering it avoids?

Remember, again, that we are not defining "pleasure" or "happiness" in any crude or narrow sense. We are speaking generally of positive experiences, of positive states of mind. What else could we want but that? A philosopher might well insist that happiness in this sense, is the "final end" of human action.

A second step also seems natural. If something is a good thing, more of it is pretty clearly better. Thus, in general, we should act in such a way as to produce the *most* happiness. Maximize happiness; minimize pain and suffering.

The claim is that this is just what any rational person already does. We need to plan, not just grab the nearest pleasure when it shows up. You may have to do some careful thinking, and even restrain yourself at times—giving up some short-term pleasure, for example, for longer-term gains. Maximizing happiness over a *life* does not mean that we will be happy every moment of that life.

Our strategy for happiness, in short, must become calculating. Even suffering can sometimes actually be a good thing in the long run. It may be painful to work hard, for instance, but we do it for the extra-pleasurable rewards that status or more money bring. You sweat in the sauna, uncomfortably, for the unmatched rush of pleasure that comes when you leap into

the cold water afterward. The sculptor, again, labors for months for the joy of creation, and the enjoyment of the product afterwards. The trick is to work in just enough adversity to maximize flow, or at least pleasure, later, without overdoing the pain. No point in sweating too long or working too hard or flossing more than you have to. But when a little pain now increases your net happiness in the long run, it's worth it.

THE STEP INTO ETHICS

One step remains. This step may also seem hardly more than a clarification of what we've been saying already, a more careful look at the nature of pleasure—but it turns out to make a dramatic claim.

The argument so far, strictly speaking, has been about our own individual happiness. But ethics, remember, asks us to take care for others as well as ourselves. One reason that many ethical thinkers have mistrusted hedonism, indeed, is that it seems all too easy for a concern with one's own pleasure or happiness to remain self-centered and even careless of others.

Utilitarians, however, argue that happiness itself, properly understood, is social. Our concern with happiness does not stop at the boundaries of our own selves but *must* grow to encompass others. For one thing, quite simply, it is hard to be happy all alone. Our lives take on their emotional tone from the people around us. Moreover, we naturally seek the well-being of others close to us—spouses, children, parents, friends, lovers, students and teachers, those we work for and those who work for us. Anyone who knows love knows this simple fact. Often we also care for those who are distant, those whose plight or whose successes engage our sympathies or inspire us.

Philosopher Esperanza Guisán, in Reading 15, offers a compelling metaphor for this expansive concern for happiness. Writing of the 17th-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes, she points out that his sympathetic concern for others, so readily reduced to some form of self-preoccupation, could better be seen as a proof of Hobbes' humanity. "He vibrates like a string," Guisán writes, "communicating in unison with all the other human strings." Her reference is to the way that a guitar string or piano wire starts sounding overtones when strings near it are plucked or struck. We are *tuned* to each other. That is part of what it is to be human—maybe even part of what it is simply to be animal.

Barbara Frederickson's account of positivity can help us here as well. "Flourishing," she claims,

goes beyond happiness. . . . True, people who flourish are happy. But that's not the half of it. Beyond feeling good, they're also *doing* good—adding value to the world. People who flourish are highly engaged with their families, work, and communities. They're driven by a sense of purpose: they know why they get up in the morning. Striving to flourish, then, is a noble goal. It's not just about making yourself happy. It's about doing something

valuable with your day and with your life. Although flourishing is noble, it need not imply grand or grandiose actions. It simply requires transcending self-interest enough to share and celebrate goodness in others and in the natural world.

These are psychological, empirical claims: that our own happiness is in fact bound up with the happiness of others. Beside them, some philosophers propose a more conceptual argument as well. We are beginning with the idea that happiness is the ultimate good thing. This claim in turn is based on a general claim about human beings (and perhaps some non-human beings as well). It's not just about me. From an ethical point of view, then, I cannot say that someone else's happiness is of no concern to me simply because I'm me, so to speak, and they're them. (Notice there's more than a shade of Kant here.) The conclusion is that happiness *as such* is a morally good thing, wherever it occurs—and it is good in the same way and to the same extent.

We are left, in short, with a commitment to the happiness of others beyond the self. And if happiness alone is the good, and if more of it is better and the most the best, then we have a commitment to achieve the *most* happiness we can in society as a whole. We have arrived at utilitarianism.

FOUNDERS

Two English thinkers advanced utilitarianism as a modern theory of ethics: Jeremy Bentham (1748–1832) and John Stuart Mill (1806–1873).

Bentham started out as a social critic, concerned for more enlightened legislation, and was a lifelong opponent of the severe British penal codes of his time. It was Bentham who popularized the most famous version of utilitarianism: the formula of the *greatest good of the greatest number*. He called it the “Principle of Utility” in ethics—the formula that economists put as “Maximize Utility”—from which the term “utilitarianism” comes. (Technically modern utilitarians are a bit more careful: the greatest *good* is the goal, for sure, but it might not strictly be of the greatest *number*—a question to which we'll return.)

“Good” for Bentham emphatically meant *pleasure*. Moreover, he thought pleasures could readily be quantified, and he tried to devise criteria for weighing pleasures directly against each other. Bentham actually imagined that we could one day solve ethical problems by sitting down with a calculator, figuring up the amounts of pleasure on either side!

Mill inherited the utilitarian project from Bentham and from his own father, James Mill. He gave it his own characteristic twists and developments, but on the key points he is one with them:

Pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends; all desirable things . . . are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention

of pain. . . . Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness.

And Mill insists that such an ethic appeals directly to our social nature.

The deeply rooted conception which every individual even now has of himself as a social being, tends to make him feel it one of his natural wants that there should be harmony between his feelings and those of his fellow creatures. . . . This feeling in most individuals is much inferior in strength to their selfish feelings, and is often wanting altogether. But to those who have it, it possesses all the characters of a natural feeling. It does not present itself to their minds as a superstition of education, or a law despotically imposed by the power of society. . . . This conviction is the ultimate sanction of the greatest happiness morality.

UTILITARIANISM IN PRACTICE: ECONOMIC THINKING

Solving ethical problems by quantifying pleasures turns out to be trickier than Bentham thought. For one thing, pleasure seems to be too subjective to measure in any accurate way, even when we are comparing our own pleasures with one another, certainly when we are trying to compare different people's. Happiness is probably even less quantifiable. Utilitarianism in practice has therefore moved toward a more economic way of thinking, looking at a more external (not so psychological) calculus of costs and benefits, and the more neutral and seemingly objective language of "utilities."

The logic, stays the same. When there are multiple choices with different utilities or when utilities conflict, we should always pick the greatest overall balance of positive over negative. Should you finish your degree now, say, even under financial and emotional hardship, or let it go and make things easier? Each choice has its specific benefits and its costs, and many can be at least partly quantified. In theory, the utilitarian answer is clear: choose a way that achieves the greatest net benefit—the highest total benefits over costs.

Social questions are to be decided the same way. We debate about assisted suicide, for example: about whether doctors should be allowed or expected to help people die if they so choose. Utilitarians would decide the question by looking at the effects on society as a whole. If assisted suicide would promote social utility, all told, then it should be allowed. If it doesn't, it shouldn't. What else (they would ask) could be relevant? What could be more obvious?

This looks like an empirical question. Maybe we can actually resolve it. The benefits of assisted suicide seem very concrete: relief of suffering—for dying people, who are often in great physical pain and sometimes emotional pain too, unable to secure relief by themselves, and also for their families, who may suffer greatly too, emotionally and financially, when dying is prolonged and hard. The costs, by contrast, are much more indefinite and speculative, and do not necessarily have any effect on happiness. Some people may feel pressured

into choosing assisted suicide, for example, and we might come somehow to “devalue life.” Put in the balance with the clear benefits, though, many utilitarians tend to think that these sorts of costs—such as they are—will clearly be outweighed.

Sometimes utilitarians call on economics directly. Suppose that the question is whether to build a dam that will generate electricity and provide irrigation and recreation but will also cost money, displace families or towns, and flood valuable land. How do we decide? Naturally, say utilitarians, we try to quantify the various benefits and costs. How much social utility will be gained from the dam? How much will be lost?

As far as possible, economists calculate the answers in dollars. What will the dam cost? How much money will it take to compensate people who have to move? What is the monetary value of the land that will be lost? All of these costs must be weighed against the monetary value of the electricity produced, the dollar gain in food production due to irrigation, added income from recreation, and so on—as well as the net benefits that could be gained from doing something else with the same resources. More sophisticated calculations factor in the long-run probability of these benefits continuing (maybe high but less than 100 percent) and consider the costs when the dam’s useful life is over (dams eventually silt up and become useless). In the end, though, once again, the aim is still to answer a simple question: which choice has the highest net benefits?

Utilitarianism, then, draws attention squarely back to what is actually good or bad for people—to specific consequences for utilities, and behind them for what we suppose to be happiness—rather than to the sometimes abstract rules that too often (say utilitarians) are supposed to define what’s ethical. In this utilitarianism regards itself as no more than systematized common sense. *Do what has the best effects*—surely no one could disagree with so obvious a maxim!

READING 14

From *Utilitarianism*

JOHN STUART MILL

JOHN STUART MILL (1806–1873) was an English philosopher and political economist who wrote widely not only on ethics but on political liberty and also logic and science. He has been called “the most influential English-speaking philosopher of the nineteenth century.” Mill also served as a liberal reformist Member of Parliament for a term in the 1860s, where among other things

From John Stuart Mill, *Utilitarianism*, chapter 2.

he became the first person in the history of Parliament to call for women to be given the right to vote. His book *Utilitarianism*, from which this excerpt comes, is still the definitive formulation of utilitarianism and of the Ethics of Happiness generally.

The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure. To give a clear view of the moral standard set up by the theory, much more requires to be said; in particular, what things it includes in the ideas of pain and pleasure; and to what extent this is left an open question. But these supplementary explanations do not affect the theory of life on which this theory of morality is grounded—namely, that pleasure, and freedom from pain, are the only things desirable as ends; and that all desirable things (which are as numerous in the utilitarian as in any other scheme) are desirable either for the pleasure inherent in themselves, or as means to the promotion of pleasure and the prevention of pain . . .

The ultimate end, with reference to and for the sake of which all other things are desirable (whether we are considering our own good or that of other people), is an existence exempt as far as possible from pain, and as rich as possible in enjoyments, both in point of quantity and quality; the test of quality, and the rule for measuring it against quantity, being the preference felt by those who in their opportunities of experience, to which must be added their habits of self-consciousness and self-observation, are best furnished with the means of comparison. This, being, according to the utilitarian opinion, the end of human action, is necessarily also the standard of morality; which may accordingly be defined, the rules and precepts for human conduct, by the observance of which an existence such as has been described might be, to the greatest extent possible, secured to all mankind; and not to them only, but, so far as the nature of things admits, to the whole sentient creation.

. . . When it is positively asserted to be impossible that human life should be happy, the assertion, if not something like a verbal quibble, is at least an exaggeration. If by happiness be meant a continuity of highly pleasurable excitement, it is evident enough that this is impossible. A state of exalted pleasure lasts only moments, or in some cases, and with some intermissions, hours or days, and is the occasional brilliant flash of enjoyment, not its permanent and steady flame. Of this the philosophers who have

taught that happiness is the end [goal] of life were as fully aware as those who taunt them. The happiness which they meant was not a life of rapture; but moments of such, in an existence made up of few and transitory pains, many and various pleasures, with a decided predominance of the active over the passive, and having as the foundation of the whole, not to expect more from life than it is capable of bestowing. A life thus composed, to those who have been fortunate enough to obtain it, has always appeared worthy of the name of happiness. And such an existence is even now the lot of many, during some considerable portion of their lives. The present wretched education, and wretched social arrangements, are the only real hindrance to its being attainable by almost all.

The objectors perhaps may doubt whether human beings, if taught to consider happiness as the end of life, would be satisfied with such a moderate share of it. But great numbers of mankind have been satisfied with much less. The main constituents of a satisfied life appear to be two, either of which by itself is often found sufficient for the purpose: tranquillity, and excitement. With much tranquillity, many find that they can be content with very little pleasure: with much excitement, many can reconcile themselves to a considerable quantity of pain. There is assuredly no inherent impossibility in enabling even the mass of mankind to unite both; since the two are so far from being incompatible that they are in natural alliance, the prolongation of either being a preparation for, and exciting a wish for, the other . . . When people who are tolerably fortunate in their outward lot do not find in life sufficient enjoyment to make it valuable to them, the cause generally is, caring for nobody but themselves. To those who have neither public nor private affections, the excitements of life are much curtailed, and in any case dwindle in value as the time approaches when all selfish interests must be terminated by death: while those who leave after them objects of personal affection, and especially those who have also cultivated a fellow-feeling with the collective interests of mankind, retain as lively an interest in life on the eve of death as in the vigour of youth and health. Next to selfishness, the principal cause which makes life unsatisfactory is want of mental cultivation. A cultivated mind—I do not mean that of a philosopher, but any mind to which the fountains of knowledge have been opened, and which has been taught, in any tolerable degree, to exercise its faculties—finds sources of inexhaustible interest in all that surrounds it; in the objects of nature, the achievements of art, the imaginations of poetry, the incidents of history, the ways of mankind, past and present, and their prospects in the future . . .

The deeply rooted conception which every individual even now has of himself as a social being, tends to make him feel it one of his natural wants that there should be harmony between his feelings and aims and those of his fellow creatures. If differences of opinion and of mental culture make it impossible for him to share many of their actual feelings—perhaps make him denounce and defy those feelings—he still needs to be conscious that his real aim and theirs do not conflict; that he is not opposing himself to what they really wish for, namely their own good, but is, on the contrary, promoting it. This feeling in most individuals is much inferior in strength to their selfish feelings, and is often wanting altogether. But to those who have it, it possesses all the characters of a natural feeling. It does not present itself to their minds as a superstition of education, or a law despotically imposed by the power of society, but as an attribute which it would not be well for them to be without. This conviction is the ultimate sanction of the greatest happiness morality. This it is which makes any mind, of well-developed feelings, work with, and not against, the outward motives to care for others, afforded by what I have called the external sanctions; and when those sanctions are wanting, or act in an opposite direction, constitutes in itself a powerful internal binding force, in proportion to the sensitiveness and thoughtfulness of the character; since few but those whose mind is a moral blank, could bear to lay out their course of life on the plan of paying no regard to others except so far as their own private interest compels.

READING 15

“An Ethic of Liberty and Solidarity”

ESPERANZA GUISÁN

TRANSLATED BY KETEVAN KEPATADZE

ESPERANZA GUISÁN (1940–2015) was a professor of ethical and political philosophy at the University of Santiago de Compostela in Spain, writing extensively on utilitarianism and on democracy, ethics without religion, and Kant. Relatively unknown in the English-speaking world, her work is notable for both its

Combined passages from *Manifiesto hedonista* (p. 19, 40–43, and 59–60) and *Una Ética de Libertad y Solidaridad* (p. 77–80). Reproduced with permission of Ketevan Kapatadze

insistent optimism and its radical political character. Achieving a broad-based and securely-rooted general happiness is possible, she holds, but it will require a resolute and potentially radical program of social change to accomplish.

In this, Guisán recollects utilitarianism's founders as well. Both the older and the younger Mills as well as Jeremy Bentham were social reformers for exactly the same reasons and in much the same way. Bentham was especially radical, arguing insistently for reforming the prisons, animal welfare, universal suffrage, and the decriminalization of homosexuality, and against the rigid traditional morality still powerful in his time—all on broadly utilitarian grounds. Guisán gives us an invigorating sense of what a similarly radical reform agenda might look like today.

One note about the term “hedonism.” Guisán embraces what she calls “hedonism”: it seems to be her name for her version of utilitarianism itself. But her kind of hedonism is quite far not only from the individualistic pleasure-seeking of the usual stereotype discussed in the text, but also from the calmer and more upbeat philosophical hedonism that the first part of this chapter suggests in its place. Hers is more “turbulent,” as she puts it, and ephemeral and political. See what you think—but just remember that not just a few terms but the very nature of human motivation is part of the issue here.

FROM A HEDONIST MANIFESTO

I would like to offer several suggestions that, in my opinion, are undeniable theories that self-recommend and self-justify:

1. A life with unnecessary suffering is absurd, useless, and reprehensible.
2. Sacrifices, on an individual's part, are only justified when there is an increased chance for happiness.
3. Only the attainment of happiness for all might justify limiting and restricting access to individual pleasures.

As a corollary:

4. Happiness (with its meaning duly explained) constitutes the meaning of life, and its advancement should guide all individual and collective actions. [. . .]

I will focus on what I consider to be the corollary of my theories: happiness constitutes the meaning of life. Consequently, a life that

is spent in search of undefined and distant opportunities of happiness is absurd, irrational and useless. . . .

We are born and our lives acquire meaning when our abilities are developed, our feelings of frustration are transformed into satisfactions brought about by the achieved goals; the pain of solitude and marginality are substituted by the joy of meeting others, by being in the company of others, by our friendships with and affections for others, by cooperation and shared work. . . .

Do not undervalue your life in search of things; do not give yourself up to anyone in exchange for things. Only your profound and everlasting happiness has value. . . .

Hedonism . . . is a fight against authorities and not a lounge or armchair philosophy. It is rather a ragged and turbulent philosophy, because it teaches us that the Garden of Epicurus is not enough any more; that we need more than fresh water and more than a single friend, no matter how valuable they might be, due to the uncertainty of contemporary life. . . .

For a hedonist *we are the others and the others are us*. When people ask how Mill was able to make the shift from the hedonist philosophy focused on an individual to one focused on humanity as a whole, they fail to understand the dimensions of human personality. Hobbes, a sort of hedonist himself, used to say that egoism smelled of hypocrisy. Once, when he was asked why he had come to rescue of someone in need, Hobbes replied that seeing them suffer caused him sorrow, while easing their suffering meant alleviating his own pain. Someone with a rather simplistic view would conclude that Hobbes was a practicing egoist even when he wasn't writing philosophical books. One with a bit more of *sympatheia* would see this as a proof of Hobbes' humanity. . . . He vibrates like a string, communicating in unison with all the other human strings.

Hedonism [. . .] means a permanent and radical revolution. Permanent in a sense that its mission is never complete. Criticism does not make this philosophy blush, but rather emboldens and propels it. Hence, self-criticism is its constant and always welcome practice. Not a type of self-criticism that is self-indulgent, erudite, or devastating, but one that offers a sincere encouragement and a healthy dose of unbreakable optimism. *Radical* in a sense that it attacks the root of all problems. It does not replace one evil with another, like a dictatorship with a bureaucracy, or an autocracy with an oligarchy. *Radical* in breadth and profoundness of the change it brings.

Hedonists are not optimists. . . . Rather, like existentialists, they understand the limits of their existence, struggle with anxiety, and look towards the future. . . . Hedonists are almost always

heroic pessimists who do not give themselves up to death, who have lots of fears and desires which frighten them, lots of sufferings from which they wish to detach themselves without contaminating others. Hedonists are not the kinds of people who naively think that the world is a bed of roses, but those who feel the thorns, wish to pick the rose, and end the suffering. Hedonists are chimeric and utopian, because they think not only of the best of the existing world, but about the best of the imagined world. . . .

Hedonists wish to end all the suffering of the world, as the first phase of an ambitious politics that leads to the development of harmonious, blessed, and free people. But, the suffering of the world is like a deceitful monster with multiple heads and, when one is guillotined, others threaten to reemerge.

Hedonists do not see anything heroic or positive in human suffering. Accepting the world as it is, full of pain and limitations, they understand that the test of suffering could make us more humane and help us empathize with others. But all pain in itself is offensive, and if people become wise only through suffering, it's an indication that something is wrong with the Cosmic Order. They would have to fight hard to change such order, denounce and denigrate it for as long as they are entitled to report dissatisfaction.

Hedonists are the most radical of all rebels. They exceed their authority as their rebellion frees them from all imposed limitations. The game of "positive thinking" is unattractive to them. "Impossible" is a cursed word in their dictionary, because it implies that someone else is limiting their opportunities. Hedonists are the only anarchists who rebel against the powers of heaven and earth, who insult gods, whether it is Jupiter or Jehovah. Their god is a human being, as heralded by Feuerbach. They do not want anybody or anything to usurp the right of all to organize their lives, feed their muses, have their gardens, their poems, and their refuge. They want every human being to be able to say: "Here is my only norm: to be happy, and infect others with happiness."

HAPPINESS IS LIKE A BIRD

Beauty is part of happiness. Beauty does not exist by itself. We call things beautiful because we like them, they give us pleasure, they alleviate our pain, and they cause ecstasy. Beauty has so many doors that it doesn't just live in Wagner or Beethoven, in Picasso or Velazquez, but also in a wisp of herb, a simple tablecloth, a meal shared with others. Beauty drinks from joy, and joy—from beauty. They are glasses that communicate.

It happens that we haven't been educated either for joy nor for beauty. We live a sordid and grey life, confusing means with goals. We are consistently in a rush. This eagerness to escape is evident every weekend if one looks at the caravan of cars on the highways. Legions of humans, protected by cars, wander from one place to another. They return more tired and bored than before they left, but with the feeling that they have done their duty.

After living this grey life, with domestic arguments, with small savings, man dies, worried, full of terrors and sorrows, ending the life full of insignificance. Nonetheless, happiness is a blue bird that one evening rested on our warm palm and left a trail of memory of a paradise lost; a place that all of us dream about whether in our sleep or when we are awake.

MILL'S ETHICAL APPEAL

One can say without exaggeration that Mill brought together the very best of the traditions he came in contact with and, based on them, developed appealing and original theories. In our times of conservative liberalism and savage capitalism, Mill reminds us that the role of the economy is not to increase productivity and profitability, but to satisfy the inner self of human beings.

He dedicated himself fully to the betterment of humanity, without the need to abandon private pleasures of life in Harriet's company. [*Harriet Taylor was Mill's longtime friend and fellow ethical philosopher, today generally credited as co-author with Mill of the strongly feminist essay "The Subjection of Women" (1869), and in her last years was married to Mill.*] Despite a mental crisis and physical illnesses, Mill must have been one of the happiest people in the world. His assertion that a virtuous life equaled a happy life . . . was not a mere slogan, nor a play on words that had nothing to do with the way he lived privately and publicly.

Mill . . . fought for both private betterment and social progress. He fought for the *flourishing* of the self, as well as others. He has nothing in common with the ridiculous Rousseau, who while defending kids in his writings, left his own in orphanages. On a theoretical level, Mill surpasses Hume: he goes deeper into the knowledge of human nature and situates himself opposite Kant, considered "officially" as an ethical person par excellence. . . .

It will not hurt to point out several differences between the two. Kant divides human nature into passion and reason, flesh and spirit. His zeal for rational ethics makes him belittle human needs and desires. He belittles human beings, putting them in service of a strange and suspicious form of irrationality, called "pure" reason.

All of this does not prevent us from seeing Kant's ethics as somewhat tragic and dramatic. He proclaims the beauty of the "moral law in me and in the starry sky over me." For Mill, moral beauty is in me, and it also exists in the starry sky full of grandeur. But, I am complete, seduced by others, in love with others. It is not the laws, foreign to me as a human being (with passions and desires), that determine the Good in me, but the reasoning that grows and develops in me, passionately, and is useful to others.

For Mill, it is not about the ethics that surges from my connection to "pure" reason, but about the ethics that surges from my coexistence with others and from my natural, albeit sometimes scarce, sentiment of *sympathy*. While Kant is a solitary, pietistic and rigorous person, Mill is one who is in love and searches for kindred spirits to keep him company.

[Still,] in the end, they have more in common than what's evident at first sight. Kant, who seems to be "purer" of the two, was simply more intransigent and puritan. Mill's ethics is one of personal and social development. Unlike the caricature that has been created of him, he is not a supporter of Welfare (economic comfort), but rather of Well-being (psychological comfort), though he does not discount the importance of relatively comfortable life accessible equally to everyone. . . . If he declares that he is a non-believer, it is because he considers it ethically unacceptable to believe in God that allows the suffering of humans and condemns them to an eternal fire. . . .

In this world of ours, where impartiality and solidarity are rare, where marginalization, discrimination towards women, and negligence towards the most vulnerable prevails, we can learn a great deal from this man who lived two centuries ago, who was ahead of his and our times, surpassing the dichotomy between the right and left and demanding a new kind of life. . . . We need people who will not just defend Mill's words, but will dedicate their lives [to] spreading the energy that inspired them, balancing the demands of freedom with those of solidarity and safeguarding harmony between them.

COMPLICATIONS

The Ethics of Happiness has great attractions. Happiness, again, is a readily recognized, universal, commonsensical goal and standard. No special argument or philosophy or religious perspective is necessary to understand and appreciate it. Broadly speaking, *shared* happiness is also a commonsensical and common goal, and is basic to modern democratic states. The rough-and-ready

egalitarianism of the Ethics of Happiness has even been called “the moral side of democracy.” In its specific form of utilitarianism, the Ethics of Happiness also gives us a usable method of decision-making in any cases, both to make individual decisions and to make social and economic decisions.

At the same time, though, and not surprisingly, the Ethics of Happiness also has limits and challenges. There are complications, including some serious problems, especially once utilitarianism pushes beyond the modest kind of hedonism with which the argument begins. Here we must enter, at least a little, the debate over utilitarianism as an ethical theory.

UTILITY AS THE SINGLE MEASURE OF VALUES

Remember (from chapter 4) that one of the main motives for ethical theory is simplification: finding some sort of order and unity in what might seem to be a hodgepodge of different values, both for intellectual elegance and to make it easier to decide what to do in the end. From this point of view, even four families of values are three too many. Ideally—so some theorists say—we need just one.

Utilitarians argue that ultimately all values reduce to benefits and costs. All ethical thinking, and all ethical conflict, they say, is really about one thing—what will truly achieve the greatest happiness of all, all things considered and in the long run. And so, utilitarians say, we are justified in *translating* all other values into benefit-and-cost terms—“cashing them out,” so to speak. Happiness becomes utilitarianism’s single measure for all moral thinking.

Think of assisted suicide again, or the dam-building example. In the last section we discussed these issues briefly from a utilitarian point of view. On the face of it, though, there are also nonutilitarian values involved. Issues of justice and rights, for example: justice to people whose land the dams might flood, say—maybe long-time owners who have cherished this one place on Earth—or people’s rights to choose to die, even if it doesn’t serve the “greatest good” or even (someone else’s idea of) their own.

But: couldn’t these values be understood in terms of happiness, a calculus of benefits and costs? Certainly justice, say, promotes happiness much of the time. Indirectly, it also promotes social stability, which in turn leads to happiness. An unjust social order—unfair, unequal, arbitrary—would make a lot of people unhappy much of the time, and it would also be prone to resistance and overthrow, leading to even more uncertainty and unrest. It’s not a picture that looks too satisfying.

Mill explicitly grounded justice on utility:

Justice is a name for certain classes of moral rules which concern the essentials of human well-being more nearly, and are therefore of moral absolute obligation, than any other rules for the guidance of life. . . . [T]hey are the

main element in determining the social feelings of mankind. It is their observance which alone preserves peace among human beings.

We should indeed promote justice, then, but not ultimately for its own sake. We should promote it because it helps maximize utility. It serves the social good.

Utilitarians would go on to argue that while justice is *usually* a good thing, it is not *always* a good thing. In fact, it is not a good thing if it irresolvably conflicts with social utility. In an emergency, for example, we sometimes cut corners—even violate some people’s rights—for the sake of saving greater social goods. Mill again:

[C]ases may occur in which some other social duty is so important as to overrule . . . the general maxims of justice. Thus, to save a life, it may not only be allowable, but a duty, to steal or take by force the necessary food or medicine, or to kidnap and compel to officiate the only qualified medical practitioner.

So even stealing or kidnapping doctors might be morally acceptable, or even a duty, in a pinch! Strong stuff—but not necessarily implausible, and perfectly natural if you are a utilitarian. In a system where utility rules, every other value must eventually pass utility’s muster.

Utilitarians would say the same of the virtues. No character trait, they argue, is simply good by itself. Rather, good traits are good because they promote utility. Take honesty, for example. It might seem that dishonesty often has major benefits. Little (or not so little) deceptions can keep you ahead of the crowd and out of trouble. But deception also has costs and dangers. It takes a lot of work. It’s emotionally draining to have your guard up all the time. Besides, when the deceptions fail, as they often will, you may lose your friends. Thus, arguably, dishonesty is a bad idea, even on utilitarian grounds. It is not a matter of benefits to you being trumped by some more abstract kind of value, but simply of thinking more carefully about the tangible costs in the long run.

Some people think that no deception can ever be ethical and propose to tell the truth even to criminals who threaten you and to children too young to understand. But it is not at all clear that this kind of hyper-truthfulness has positive overall effects. Surely, at least in this case, most of us will say that here is where the value of honesty ends: when it really does have bad consequences, all things considered. Here, in short, the utilitarian “single measure” becomes the *judge* of other values. Those moral values that don’t “cash out” in terms of utility are not really moral values after all.

DOES UTILITARIANISM GO TOO FAR?

As you might imagine, though, these utilitarian moves are controversial. Critics argue that while utility and utilitarian considerations are indeed important, they cannot be the whole story.

First of all, is it really true that justice, say, is only good so far as it serves social utility? Certainly our legal system doesn't think so. Everyone is entitled to a fair trial and to be presumed innocent, even though he or she may turn out to be guilty. It might be much more satisfying, not to mention cheaper, simply to put away a whole class of criminal suspects without any trial at all. Yet we will not stand for it. Ethically as well as legally, it is not *right*—not just, not fair, not respectful of persons.

Utilitarians do try to defend many important rights. Rights to free speech, liberty, and all the rest serve social utility. They maximize the general happiness—usually. When they don't, though, utilitarians can only conclude that there are no such rights. Mill, again, even endorses kidnapping doctors under some (extreme) circumstances. But what good is a utilitarian kind of “right,” critics say, if the moment social needs conflict with them, utilitarianism no longer stands behind them? The whole point of rights is to stop this kind of thinking—taking a person as a mere means to some social good—dead in its tracks.

We may be no happier with utilitarianism's treatment of the virtues. Can pleasure (or “utility” in *any* guise) really be the ethical bottom line? Aren't some pleasures just wrong, however pleasurable they may be? And not wrong because they lead to greater displeasure somewhere down the line, but just plain *wrong*—wrong because we should not take pleasure from such things in the first place.

Mill vacillated on this point, speaking at times of “higher” and “lower” pleasures. “Higher” pleasures are supposed to be better—worthier of human beings. “It is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.” But it is not at all clear why. If pleasure alone is the good, how can one of two equally pleasurable pleasures still be “better”? It appears that Mill himself wants to introduce some nonutilitarian factors into the mix—a sensible move, for sure, but no credit to utilitarianism.

UTILITARIAN NIRVANA

Suppose that it becomes possible to set up a grand virtual-reality experience—machine that creates for you any kind of experience you choose. For the rest of your life you could be plugged into a fantasy world, tailor-made to make you delirious with pleasure, riding the biggest surf in the world, or heroically saving the galaxy from evil invaders, or playing Rachmaninoff while conducting the New York Philharmonic from the keyboard, or whatever else your fantasy might be (have fun filling in the blanks). You'd never know that really you are just a wasted semi-corpse, lying on a bed somewhere kept alive by IVs and a few doctors, your head wired to a monitor.

But what's the difference, if happiness is the only thing that counts?

This is a famous thought experiment invented by the philosopher Robert Nozick (1938–2002) to challenge hedonistic utilitarianism. It is not merely hypothetical, either. Americans currently watch 250 billion hours of TV a year. (Yup—250 *billion*.) The average elementary-school child watches four hours a day. (And you?) Is this so very different? If Nozick's experience-machine makes you uneasy, shouldn't TV make you uneasy too? If you say in either case that we ought not to be settling for such paltry substitutes for the real world, what kinds of moral values are you appealing to?

THE PROBLEM OF MEASUREMENT

If utility is to be the single measure of values, it must also, obviously, be a *measure* of values. It must offer a usable and concretely applicable way to think. Some critics of utilitarianism argue, however, that “happiness” and “utility” are such vague terms that we cannot really measure or weigh the relative utilities of different courses of action. Seldom am I even sure about what would make *me* happiest, for instance, let alone other people—or how to compare my happiness to theirs, or even my own specific happinesses to each other. Meanwhile, the ripple effects of even the simplest act are almost incalculable, all the more so if it affects large numbers of people.

Should I spend my vacation at the beach or helping build houses with Habitat for Humanity? I would probably enjoy the beach more, though I do like to build and to help out too. Building houses would help make the future occupants happier, though the houses will get built anyway, just about as well whether I am there or not. Is there any precise way to weigh a sharp and immediate pleasure for me—one person—against the smaller and less definite contribution I might make to the quite different and longer-term happiness of others? And even this is barely the beginning. If I go on the Habitat trip, someone else will not go: perhaps the trip would be better for them than for me? Or maybe *they* would up the total happiness more by going to the beach? (Or somewhere else?) Who are they, anyway? And how do I weigh in the possible benefits to others (my students, say, or my family) from my being somewhat better rested after the beach? Then again, what about my long-run contribution to beach erosion and the commercial overdevelopment of fragile coast ecologies?

Despite its appearance of hardheaded practicality then, utilitarianism may actually be useless, or worse, as a practical way to make decisions. What really happens in such cases, critics worry, is that utilitarian language lends itself too readily to offhand self-justification. Whatever I do, I can justify myself by pointing to the happiness I (might) produce or costs I (might) avoid. Just

this accusation has been leveled against the monetary calculation of “costs” and “benefits,” for example, as in the dam project. All the numbers look very rational and impartial and responsible, but underneath, say the critics, it’s all really guesswork, dressed up to justify whatever the decision maker is inclined to do anyway. Wouldn’t we be better served by a more modest, partial, and concrete kind of utilitarianism that did not claim to be the measure of all values?



FOR REVIEW

1. How can it be argued that pleasure or happiness is our ultimate goal?
2. What kind of “hedonism” does utilitarianism embrace?
3. According to Barbara Frederickson, why do we have strong positive emotions?
4. What are utilitarianism’s first two steps beyond hedonism?
5. What justifies utilitarianism’s final step, into a *social* ethic?
6. Who were Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill?
7. Why and how does utilitarianism tend to embrace economic thinking?
8. How does utilitarianism become “an ethic of liberty and solidarity” according to Esperanza Guisán?
9. Why does Guisán say that “happiness is like a bird”?
10. How do utilitarians argue that utility is the single measure of all values?
11. Why do critics argue that there is no single measure of all values?
12. What are some other important uses and limits of utilitarian thinking, according to the text?



FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

6.1 QUESTIONS

Happiness seems like the clearest and most commonsense of goals. But is it? Here are a few questions to consider.

Hedonists believe that pleasure or happiness is the chief and probably only ultimate human end. How might they deal with people who pretty clearly seek something other than happiness, or even seek things that are guaranteed to produce unhappiness: people who give their lives in battle, say, or willingly undergo great suffering to achieve something magnificent or uncertain? You could

stretch and say that in some metaphysical or unusual sense they're "happy," but this is not true, really, if they're in great pain or never see the fruits of their labors or die in the pursuit. Yet these may still be morally admirable things to do.

And what about you yourself? Is happiness really your *only* goal?

Look around, too. Do you find that people in general are very happy? Really? We are now spectacularly richer and more technologically accomplished than anyone could even have dreamed for most of human history, but at the same time suicide and depression are epidemic and massive numbers of people need medication just to get through their day. Studies suggest that wealthy countries are even less happy than poor ones. How can this be? Why do we so reliably produce our own unhappiness? Is the answer that we really don't understand happiness? Or that we don't understand what we are doing? But how could that be?

All of the other families of moral values hold that a pleasure or happiness could be morally bad in itself. Not for the Ethics of Happiness, since happiness just *is* the good. But this would mean that the pleasures of a sadist, say, are not bad in themselves. Rather, as with everything else on the utilitarian view, the pleasures of the sadist are supposed to be bad because of their effects: more unhappiness for other people than the sadist gains for himself or herself. Can this be true? Could sadistic pleasure be okay (in fact, be good) if no one else were harmed by it (for example, if the sadism were only virtual, with no likelihood of spilling over into actual harm to others)? Or what if a sadist had an enormous capacity for pleasure, so that his or her pleasures actually exceeded the suffering of all those who were harmed? Would sadism be a good thing then? (Is this what utilitarianism really implies?) Oughtn't we be able to criticize some pleasures or happinesses themselves?

Once again, ask that question specifically about yourself also. Are all of *your* pleasures ethically good in themselves (or if bad, only bad because of the worse consequences, on balance, for others or yourself)?

6.2 APPLYING THE ETHICS OF HAPPINESS

For the second time, here is a set of ethical questions and issues to work through. Again, pick two or three that especially interest you, or consider them all if you can. Ask in each case how the Ethics of Happiness might answer the questions or orient us toward the issue. Remember that the aim of this exercise is to *explore*, not necessarily to arrive at some final, definitive, fully confident answer. How do your answers to these questions compare to your answers to the same questions in chapter 5?

1. ETHICS AT SCHOOL

Moral questions arise in the lives of students. For example, does the Ethics of Happiness have anything to say about how you conduct yourself as a student?

To what extent can and should you be tending to the general happiness in your life as a student? What would this look like in practice?

Correspondingly, does the Ethics of Happiness have anything to say about how colleges and universities themselves are set up and governed? About grading systems? About pedagogy (for example, what is the most moral way to teach?) and the curriculum? About the place of schooling in life generally?

Most generally, has the Ethics of Happiness anything to say about the moral value of education itself? Is there a moral obligation to learn (and to teach)? Why or why not? And does the subject of study matter?

2. ETHICS AT WORK

Moral questions arise in our working lives. For example, surely the Ethics of Happiness has something to say about how you might make decisions as a worker or manager. To what extent can and should you be tending to the general happiness in society, in the workplace, among your co-workers and those you may be responsible for, in your life as a worker or manager? What would this look like in practice?

Correspondingly, does the Ethics of Happiness have anything to say about how work itself is set up in our society? About wages and salaries? About how work and workplaces are organized? Are certain kinds of workplaces more moral than others, from a utilitarian point of view? If so, why?

Most generally, according to the Ethics of Happiness, what is the moral value of work itself? Is there an ethical obligation to work? Why or why not? Does the kind of work matter?

Do we work way too much for our own happiness? Recall (from chapter 4) that the so-called “work ethic” has been traditionally understood in terms of the Ethics of Virtue. Recently, however, a certain kind of obsessiveness about work, also identified with the work ethic, has increasingly been questioned. Is it possible that we work too much? *Way* too much? Or that we too readily accept numbing and uninteresting work as just what work must be like?—whereas a utilitarian perspective would urge *reforming* work, maybe drastically, if it really is that bad. What do you think the work ethic is today? How do you think that the Ethics of Happiness should regard it?

3. DRUGS

According to the Ethics of Happiness, what exactly, if anything, is morally wrong with using mind-altering drugs, from marijuana to cocaine, Ecstasy, etc.? For example, what would John Stuart Mill say? What might Esperanza Guisán think? How might they justify their answers? Do you find them compelling?

Is there any morally relevant difference between these drugs, from the perspective of the Ethics of Happiness? (Oh, and should alcohol be included in this categorization? Why, why not?)

4. DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

Does the Ethics of Happiness have anything to say about the radical inequality of wealth and income in the United States and in the world today? Does an economic system that produces this kind of distribution serve the general happiness? What would Mill say? Guisán?

Remember that it is possible to argue that the economic system that has produced this distribution of wealth has also most notably produced a great deal of wealth in general, so that, arguably, even relatively badly-off people are better off under it than under at least some more egalitarian systems. Still, we may well wonder whether this is the best we can do. On this question you might look at comparative data for other semi-capitalist economies, such as Costa Rica, Australia, and the Scandinavian countries. The distribution of income is far less skewed in those societies, and reported happiness is generally higher.

Again, be aware that **Going Farther #7**—right after this chapter—will take up these questions in more detail. There is more detail on utilitarian views of justice there as well. Again—as with all of these questions—take the task here to be exploratory, not to arrive at some decisive answer.

5. OTHER ANIMALS

Don't other animals also feel pain? Though it was denied in many circles for centuries, today it is increasingly recognized that they do—sometimes extreme and mostly human-imposed pain. After all, we are animals too, and many of the ways that *we* feel pain are also shared with other animals: we have the same kinds of senses, bodies, even the same kind of emotional lives as certain other animals. But then mustn't an ethic that asks us above all to attend to the great balance of happiness over unhappiness also take account of other animals?

Traditionally, much like the Ethics of the Person, the Ethics of Happiness was applied only to humans. It simply didn't occur to most people to look beyond the human world when thinking about ethics—much, one might argue, as it did not occur to the propertied men of Jefferson's age to think of black slaves or even their own mothers and wives and daughters as also “created equal.” Still, however, it was quite early in the unfolding of utilitarianism that some utilitarians, famously including Bentham himself, began to realize that the logic of utilitarianism did not stop at the species boundary.

Pain and suffering are bad; pleasures and happiness are good—wherever they occur. They are restricted to *minds*, for sure—or to “sentient” beings, those with the capacity to *feel*—but sentience goes far beyond the sphere of the human. To restrict moral consideration to the human, then, simply because we are human, is an unjustifiable prejudice, or what animal advocates today call “speciesism.” Pain is pain, suffering is suffering. Other animals—any creature that feels—must count in the great utilitarian calculus as well.

It does not follow that humans and other animals should be treated in exactly equal ways—any more than, say, you would give all of your friends the same holiday gift if you want to make them each as happy as you can. Each type of animal's capacities must be taken into account. It may even be that humans have a greater capacity for many kinds of happiness, so that we are likely to experience more. But other animals likewise have claim to whatever happiness they can experience, which surely must weigh in the utilitarian scales also. We cannot discount the staggering number of animals upon whom today such suffering is imposed. Then too, some other animals may have the capacity for greater pleasures than us, which therefore deserve due weight as well, for the very same reason that our own do.

So here is the question: What do you think it would change to begin to extend the moral calculus to other animals in this way?

6. CLIMATE CHANGE

Does the Ethics of Happiness have anything to say about anthropogenic climate change—that is, climate change caused by current and past human activities? Current levels of emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases threaten to alter the climate of the future Earth, potentially in drastic ways. A significantly warmed world to come is not likely to be a very happy one.

The question is trickier than it might seem. For one thing, it is probably fair enough to give truly distant future generations *somewhat* less weight than the present generation in the great utilitarian calculus. As they become increasingly remote, it becomes harder to predict how they might experience or adjust to a different world. However, if we do “discount” harms (and benefits) to future generations in a systematic way, then at some (quite calculable) point, the harms and benefits won't count for *us* at all. But this surely is not right either. We could even call it, maybe, “presentism,” yet another form of unjustified prejudice, like speciesism and racism.

Then again, if future generations count in the same way as we do, since the future could go on a very long time, wouldn't their needs completely dwarf the needs of the present? How, then, can the utilitarian calculus be fair to *us*?

Another problem is that in general, higher populations mean higher total happiness, which seems to imply that the more people the better, right up to the point at which the marginal happiness of the next person finally declines to zero (for even adding people whose happiness barely exceeds their misery still adds to the total happiness, even if just slightly, and thus is supposed to be preferred by utilitarians). But the more people, probably the greater degree of environmental destruction and future climate change . . . so then what? Does utilitarianism really have the resources to deal with this sort of problem?

NOTES

A readable and provocative application of utilitarianism to a range of contemporary issues is Peter Singer's *Practical Ethics* (3rd edition, Cambridge University Press, 2011). On animals specifically, see also his *Animal Liberation* (many editions).

The Ethics Update website has a wide range of links to utilitarian texts and other philosophical resources: go to <http://ethics.sandiego.edu/theories> and then to the utilitarianism link. Dan Brock's essay "Utilitarianism," in Tom Regan and Don Vandeveer, eds., *And Justice for All: New Introductory Essays in Philosophy and Public Policy* (Rowman and Allenheld, 1982), remains an excellent though dense guide to philosophical utilitarianism as well as some of the critical issues hinted at here. Classic is J. J. C. Smart and Bernard Williams's little book *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge University Press, 1983).



GOING FARTHER #7

ETHICS AND CONCEPTIONS OF JUSTICE

This **Going Farther** section invites you to explore in more detail the question of distributive justice that has been posed in question #4 of Exercises 5.2 and 6.2. In this way we can further explore the implications of an Ethic of Persons and an Ethic of Happiness, and also introduce one of the most influential works in moral philosophy in the last half-century, John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*—a contemporary version of a Kantian moral vision, roughly speaking, with contributions by economics and even game theory. This **Going Farther** section ends by posing the question of distributive justice back to you.

UTILITARIAN VIEWS OF JUSTICE

For utilitarians, the value of anything depends on its utility: it must serve the greatest good of the greatest number. As chapter 6 suggested, the typical utilitarian follows John Stuart Mill in arguing that justice (“certain classes of moral rules,” he calls it) does indeed do so. And surely this argument is plausible—though as chapter 6 also noted, justice doesn’t *always* so serve. Mill agrees. There will be certain cases where the Ethics of Persons and the Ethics of Happiness part ways.

What about the justice of economic systems, such as the one Americans live under? We could describe it, broadly, as a modified capitalism, built upon private property and mostly market-determined wage and salary rates, with some degree of state-supported “safety net” for those who find themselves down and out within it, but, at least in America, a fairly minimal “net,” lest the incentive to work is too weakened or too great costs are imposed upon the rest of the population.

Again, one result has been a markedly skewed distribution of economic rewards, which has gotten significantly more skewed over the last thirty years. You’ve already considered the statistics, such as that the top 1% of American households now owns more than the bottom 90% of households combined. If we make the assumption that happiness even *very* roughly correlates to income, then surely the distribution of happiness is badly skewed too. As Esperanza Guisán eloquently argues, the general good is definitely not being well served. A more utilitarian system would aim for at least a somewhat more equal distribution of income and wealth, probably using policy tools familiar from the Scandinavian social democracies, such as more progressive taxation, and more state-funded systems to mitigate or obviate the disadvantages of relative poverty, such as inexpensive public transport, and subsidized medical care.

ARGUMENTS

This conclusion may be contested in various ways. Some might give up utilitarian moral justifications for the current economic system and ground it on certain rights instead, such as property rights and rights to free exchange. For strict utilitarians, of course, such supposed rights themselves ultimately are social constructions that can also be limited and redefined depending on their utility, but the Ethics of Persons might construe rights in a stricter and less flexible way (more on that in a moment).

Someone else might wonder whether a Scandinavian-style system produces much less wealth overall, so that most people would be worse off even than they are now. Maybe dramatic inequality is just the cost of a system that nonetheless really does serve the greatest happiness of the greatest number? In fact, though, although American wealth is somewhat greater, the Scandinavian countries are among the happiest in the world (World Happiness Report, <http://worldhappiness.report/>). Wealth only loosely correlates, if at all, with happiness.

However, utilitarianism is not quite as unequivocally egalitarian as it may seem at first. It is true that in a broad and loose sense, utilitarianism can be considered an egalitarian social ethic, because it makes moral judgments from the standpoint of the sum total of happiness in society. It counts everyone. Still, though it may sound surprising, this does not necessarily imply that everyone must have an equal share.

Yes, it is possible and even plausible that the “greatest good” could only come from happiness being as widely shared as possible (i.e., distributed to the “greatest number”). Contrariwise, it is also possible that the greatest good might come from making a few people—say, people who have an unusual capacity for happiness if well-endowed with resources to pursue it—very much happier while causing harm to the greater number, or leaving them in relatively great poverty, but just enough less harm in total, or just enough mitigated poverty, that there is still a net gain overall, because a few others are so *much* happier.

Thus, there might be a utilitarian case for the present system after all. Is it actually any credit to utilitarianism, though? Certainly such a distribution is troubling from the point of view of justice, isn't it, even *if* somehow it served the greatest happiness?

On the other hand, a standard line in economics is to argue in exactly the opposite way: that the so-called “marginal utility” of money decreases the more of it you have. Generally speaking, ten dollars, say, to a poor person is far more valuable than to a wealthy person. To the poor person ten dollars might be the difference between having dinner or going to bed hungry, for example, whereas for well-off people it might mean the difference between a great and a not quite so great wine. If they would even notice \$10 at all. This suggests a strong presumption, at least, in the direction of (more) equality. This is the usual economic rationale for progressive taxation—higher rates the higher your income, rather than a flat rate—for one thing. The argument is that the poor gain much more than the rich lose.

JUSTICE ACCORDING TO THE ETHICS OF PERSONS

The Ethics of Persons insists that we are all equally persons. Therefore, it seems to follow that all persons are, in some basic sense, morally equal. We are all ends in ourselves, no mere means to the happiness of others. Everyone is entitled to at least some modicum of widely-available basic goods, including the means of happiness too.

This is one way of explaining our strong intuition that a radically unequal system is morally objectionable even if it somehow did produce more total happiness, viewed as a

whole. You *cannot*, morally, just sum up happiness across persons and ignore the actual persons. Each of us has a certain integrity and self-possession that must also be honored.

What then does equality require, according to the Ethics of Persons? Not that every person should be treated exactly the same or have exactly the same things or life prospects—that is only a caricature. “Equality” in the civil rights struggle, for example, meant certain very specific and very basic things: the right to vote, the equal protection of the law, an end to third-rate schools and segregated facilities. In employment and education, it might mean equal opportunity—not being closed out because of some prejudice or irrelevant factor. It’s not as though everyone should have the same job, but everyone should have a fair chance, based on qualifications alone, at good ones.

Economic equality, once again, gets trickier. At the very least it could require taking some corrective actions when economic disparities get too great. The means might be similar to those utilitarians might favor, plus some more direct measures such as high minimum wages and strict salary caps.

Meanwhile, rights are regularly asserted on both sides of this issue. On the liberal side, there is the right to a living wage, as well as rights to decent health care and education, which on the liberal view ought not to be limited by ability to pay: they are basic human rights. (The United Nations Declaration of Human Rights—Reading #10—agrees: see Articles 22–26.) On a more conservative view, the key right is the right to property and the proceeds of work (and the UN also agrees: see Articles 17 and 23) along with free exchange.

In his book *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, libertarian philosopher Robert Nozick (1938–2002) gives a classic form to an “Entitlement” theory of justice based on the latter rights, and even more fundamentally upon the principle of liberty: the right of individuals to be free of interference or coercion by others. Nozick holds that a distribution of wealth is just simply as long as it was originally acquired without dispossessing someone else, or was freely transferred to you (given, exchanged, bought and sold) by a previous owner. These seem like reasonable starting-points. But Nozick goes on to argue that the distributions that arise under these principles are likely to be quite unequal. Some intrepid inventors or pop singers or sports stars, perhaps even a great novelist or a philosopher (who knows?), might end up quite rich. Others, for whatever reason or maybe for no reason at all, will end up with much less. On Nozick’s view, though, there is nothing *unjust* about this situation so long as it was arrived at as a consequence of free choices by people in the society. Every action within it was just. In fact, Nozick argues, what would really be morally objectionable would be to try to alter or prevent this inequality, for that would require continuously interfering with people’s free choices—violating their rights.

FROM KANT TO RAWLS

The idea that a just arrangement is one that is the outcome of a fair process emerged into philosophical attention in the late 20th century with the work of the ethical and political philosopher John Rawls (1921–2002). Rawls proposes a very different process, indeed a very different *kind* of process, to arrive at principles of justice.

Rawls agrees with Kant that ethics asks us to take a universal point of view: that in deciding moral rules or actions we should, above all, not be making exceptions for ourselves. Rawls’s great innovation was to work out a concrete way to model such a point of view, so much so in fact that fairly well-understood principles of game theory actually apply.

Imagine a group of people, Rawls says, gathered to choose the principles under which they will live together. These people are a little unusual, however, because they don’t yet know who they are, so to speak. Rawls argues that a fair set of principles, by Kantian

standards, would be principles that people would choose *prior to knowing how the principles would affect them*—when they have to imagine possibly being anyone in the society that will eventually result. After all, if being an end in yourself has nothing to do with your specific personal accomplishments or family or willpower or anything else, then it would be helpful to put these things aside, at least in imagination, while trying to think about ethical principles.

Rawls argues that people would definitely *not* choose utilitarian principles from behind this “veil of ignorance” (as he calls it). Can you see why? The reason is the one just discussed: that there is some chance that the greatest good of the greatest number could be achieved even if—maybe only if—a few people are quite miserable. Perhaps some could even be enslaved. And that someone could be you. It’s not probable, but it is possible. Behind the veil of ignorance, you can’t know for sure. Rawls argues, however, that it is not rational to gamble with your whole life, in effect, that you will not be one of the unlucky ones—a mere means to the greater happiness of the whole. Instead, the rational strategy is to make the worst outcome as good as possible, or what game theorists call *maximin*—maximizing the least well-off position: making the minimum as high as possible.

You might think in such a situation that people would opt for complete equality. Rawls agrees that we would indeed opt for equality when one person’s having more of something—say, political liberties, like free speech and the right to vote and to seek public office—would mean an equivalent loss for someone else. Equality for such goods is the best we can do. Thus the first and most basic principle of justice is what he calls the *Equal Liberty Principle*.

However, there are some goods—chiefly economic goods—that work, he holds, in a different way. Here, one person’s gain does not necessarily mean someone else’s loss. Sometimes everyone can have more—although not necessarily equally. For example, suppose that if nurses are paid twice as much as everyone else, a society would demonstrably get such first-rate health care that everyone would be better off than they would have been with poorer nurses but with slightly more income. This would be an inequality that benefits everyone.

In this case, still behind the veil of ignorance, we will aim, according to Rawls, to make sure that any inequalities that arise bring the least well-off persons as far up as any arrangement can—that is, putting the maximin strategy into action. This is what Rawls calls the *Difference Principle*—a second and more subtle principle of justice.

Careful argument and evidence may be required to decide. One could argue, for example, that large ratios between the best-paid and the average-paid employees of corporations serve the good of everyone because large benefits at the top serve as incentives to attract the most talented executives, ultimately making everyone in the enterprise better off. But it’s an empirical question. How much incentive is really necessary? Two thousand times more money, as is the case in some U.S. corporations? Even the 70 or 300 times more money that is the U.S. average? The top-to-average ratio is much lower in some countries, like Japan—apparently the Japanese consider it dishonorable to go very high—but no one could argue that Japan isn’t competitive.

Rawlsian justice does allow inequality, then, but only under certain conditions, and quite a mitigated inequality too. Also, notice that by Rawls’s principles it’s not enough that inequalities merely improve the lot of the least well-off: they have to improve it *more than any other workable arrangement*. We may have to get quite creative!

NOW IT’S UP TO YOU

Return now to question #4 in Exercises 5.2 and 6.2: broadly, the question of ethics and justice, and more specifically, the question of distributive justice. How then shall we think

about the issue of economic inequality—informed, inspired, and provoked, as it may be, by the Ethics of the Person and the Ethics of Happiness? Now, with a great deal more detail and a variety of views to consider, what after all do *you* think about the ethics of economic inequality?

Here are a few ways you can focus the question.

Philosophically, you could ask what kinds of principles of justice you think *you* would choose behind Rawls's veil of ignorance. Why? Would you choose the principles we actually seem to live under? If you say no, what are the implications for real-world ethics?

Rhetorically, you could imagine that the company of which you have become CEO has (at your ethically inspired prompting for transparency) just published salary data for all of its employees, from you and the corporate lawyers to the janitors and interns. There are huge disparities that surprise even you, though (let's say) they are not unlike the currently very skewed U.S. norm. Employees, their families, and the community are looking to you for some comment and explanation—some way to put the new information into ethical context, and perhaps some commitment to change. What will you say?

For another kind of exploration, you might consider some quite concrete forms of the struggle for fairer compensation today, such as the Living Wage movement. Check out Jon Gertner's article "What Is Living Wage?," *New York Times Magazine*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/15/magazine/what-is-a-living-wage-627275.html>, which also helpfully features some of the young researchers and activists at the forefront of the movement (also on many campuses today—quite possibly yours too).

A living wage is defined as the minimum income necessary for a worker to meet his or her basic needs—a definition that immediately puts us in mind of our definition of ethics. How could it be just, advocates ask, to not pay a full-time worker even that much? Good question: What do you think? Moreover, note that the living wage is still rock-bottom: usually only a few dollars over minimum wage (which is set by law, amid political calculations, and not necessarily enough to actually live on), barely if at all allowing for savings or education or health needs of the worker or family members, etc. Is that enough for real wage justice? What would a *just* wage, say, look like, if it were two or three steps past the *living* wage? How much? How could we decide?

Also don't forget other strategies that broadly serve economic justice but aren't directly about wages, such as the Scandinavian approach mentioned previously, focusing on widely accessible, decent-quality education, transport, and health care, which arguably benefit everyone, not just the worst-off. These are tax-funded, too, but the monies collected go into such broad social improvements, not other people's pocketbooks. Is this more just? More wise from a utilitarian point of view? And are there moves that would be better still? Such as?



GOING FARTHER #8

A UTILITARIAN APPROACH TO POVERTY

The Australian philosopher Peter Singer is today's best-known and most controversial utilitarian. His application of utilitarianism to the question of our relation to animals, in his book *Animal Liberation*, originally published in 1975, is considered one of the touchstones of the modern "animal rights" movement (though like all utilitarians, he does not argue for rights *per se*). He has also written widely and controversially on many bioethical topics.

Singer also brings utilitarianism to bear on the question of world poverty. In several academic essays and books, along with a widely read *New York Times Magazine* piece called "The Singer Solution to World Poverty," he argues that the solution is quite simple, though also, it seems, radical. It is for well-off people to give large portions of their income to provide for the basic needs of poor people around the world. Singer backs up this claim with a moral argument that is also extremely simple—but, it seems, irresistible.

Most of us in well-off countries spend large chunks of our incomes on things that we do not really need: regularly eating expensive restaurant food, for example, rather than perfectly nutritious but simple and inexpensive fare. For millions of people in the world, however—including millions of children, just to make the picture sharper—even a tiny fraction of that money could make the difference between life and death. Any plausible ethic, Singer would say, and certainly and obviously utilitarianism, must conclude that we should give as much as we can of our income to help alleviate world hunger and readily treated diseases that kill or disable millions of children a year in other parts of the world.

Singer is incontestably right about the data. Right now the average American family spends at least a third of its income on relatively indulgent things like eating out, buying new clothes or shoes, or even cars, just because the old ones have gone out of style, and taking vacations in distant and luxurious places, or driving to Disneyland or Yellowstone in the summers. These things, necessary as they may get to seem to us, look like "needs" only to the affluent. Most of the world's population gets on quite well without them. Many would consider them unimaginable luxuries. Depending on what you count as necessities, the proportion of income spent on non-necessities could actually be considered much higher. It's clear in any case, though, that much of our income is spent on things not essential to the preservation of our lives and health.

Others, meantime, are in desperate need. According to Oxfam International (<http://www.oxfamamerica.org/whatyoucando/donate>, accessed 12/22/11), 840 million people go hungry each year. Over a billion people live on less than \$1 a day. Twelve million people die each year just from a lack of water. Over 30,000 children under the age of five die *each day* due to hunger and other preventable causes.

For people in such straits, aid of even a few dollars might mean the difference between life and death. The simplest food would be enough—the sort of thing you'd never

see in a fancy restaurant, unadorned and sparse perhaps, but sufficient for the revival of strength and work for a better day. Medicines—the simplest and cheapest of antibiotics or water purification, for example, which for pennies per child could eliminate the diarrhea that kills two million children in the developing world every year. Education—basic female literacy, for starters, at the cost of a few teachers and teaching materials, the single most significant factor in empowering women, reducing birth rates, and promoting economic growth in poor countries.

It is clear to utilitarians—and surely, not just to them—that this is a morally unjustifiable situation. The same money that keeps us stylish or entertained or expensively fed, often with little or no gain to our real well-being, could do vastly more good if given instead to charities that aid the poor in developing countries as well as here at home. No elaborate or exact scale is needed to see this. It's life or death on one hand, and only passing pleasure, at best, on the other hand—on ours. Therefore, we are morally obliged to give a large portion of our income to provide basic goods to people around the world who desperately need them.

THE CASE OF BOB'S BUGATTI

Another utilitarian philosopher, Peter Unger, lays out several analogies that help make the logic of the argument clear. One is the case of a man named Bob and his rare and precious old car. Imagine that Bob is almost ready to retire, and he has invested his entire savings in a very valuable antique car—a Bugatti. Unfortunately he has not been able to insure it, but he tends to it very carefully. He loves driving and caring for the Bugatti, and he also knows that he will always be able to sell the car in the future, should he need to, and live very well on the proceeds.

One day, however, when Bob is out for a drive,

he parks the Bugatti near the end of a railway siding and goes for a walk up the track. As he does so, he sees that a runaway train, with no one aboard, is running down the railway track. Looking farther down the track, he sees the small figure of a child very likely to be killed by the runaway train. He can't stop the train and the child is too far away to warn of the danger, but he can throw a switch that will divert the train down the siding where his Bugatti is parked. Then nobody will be killed—but the train will destroy his Bugatti. Thinking of his joy in owning the car and the financial security it represents, Bob decides not to throw the switch. The child is killed. For many years to come, Bob enjoys owning his Bugatti and the financial security it represents.

So what do you think of Bob's action? What would you have done in his situation? Most of us, Singer suggests, would consider that what Bob did was wrong. Most of us would think we should throw the switch. To say this we need not deny in any way that there is a real loss to Bob—emotional as well as financial—in the destruction of his car. But between a car, however precious, and a child's life, there is no comparison. This is true even though the child's being on the track is no fault of Bob's—likely he does not know the kid at all—and even if he took great pains to park his car safely. Whether anyone is to be blamed is not the question.

Unger and Singer argue that we—you and I and most everyone living in affluent countries today—are in exactly the same situation in regard to people in desperate need elsewhere in the world. Not to help them—not to “throw the switch” by sending money

we can readily spare—is in effect to abandon them to miserable but preventable fates. In *effect*: remember, like good utilitarians, we are talking about the *consequences* of action or inaction, not about intentions or blame or anything else the least bit morally fancy. The point is simply that we can make the world dramatically better for many other people at a comparatively minor cost to ourselves. Bob can live a decent life without his car. The kid can't live a decent life if she is dead.

OBJECTIONS

It's not like we don't know, or couldn't readily figure out, where to send the money, should that be anyone's worry. I will even follow Singer and Unger's lead and give you some options right now. To "throw the switch," you can get out your credit card right now and go to https://secure.oxfamamerica.org/site/SPageServer?pagename=main_donate_go (for Oxfam; or call 1-800-77-OXFAM) or http://www.supportunicef.org/site/c.dvKUI9OWInJ6H/b.7677883/k.2C8F/Donate_now.htm (for UNICEF; or call 1-800-FOR-KIDS). Or look up your local soup kitchen or homeless shelter. One or two phone calls and you will have, alas, plenty of options. The problem cannot be that we just don't know what to do.

Other worries may come up. It may be objected, for example, that we don't know for sure that money donated to charitable organizations will actually end up feeding or helping people. This is a legitimate concern, for sure. But surely it doesn't justify doing or giving nothing at all. It is not hard to research the available options and find out which do the best by the intended recipients. Seriously: this is not a real obstacle for people who are very used to searching the Web to look into user feedback on competing products or to research political issues. If nothing else, just give to Oxfam or UNICEF, as noted, which are reliably among the best. Besides, even if there are some inefficiencies, at least some aid will get through. Which is way better than none at all.

Singer considers some other likely objections. It is true, for example, that every affluent person, including those far more affluent than you or me, has the same obligation (barring those situations where every dollar really is needed for basic survival). If everyone who has the same obligation contributed their fair (perhaps, proportional?) share, though, then your obligation and mine would probably be much lower. So why should we contribute more than our "fair shares"? Moreover, it could be argued that affluent people ought to contribute collectively through governmental aid, which is funded more equitably, at least in theory, through taxes.

The fact is, however, that other people, right now at least, are *not* stepping up to do their part. However unfortunate or unfair it might be, that is part of the scene too. There is still the question of how we—those of us who are trying to think about the situation morally and do the right thing—should respond to real needs that are not, for whatever reason, being met.

Suppose Bob were at the siding with a dozen other Bugatti owners, say—maybe they are holding a little Bugatti show in the railroad yard—and any of the others could also throw the switch and take out his or her car instead of Bob's. But none of them do. Is Bob thereby excused? Again, if you were Bob, what would you do? Of course it isn't fair, but why are we arguing about fairness at a time like this?

Certainly there is a good case for increasing foreign aid, too. Organized and sustained by governments, the aid could be more reliably and widely delivered, and the costs shared proportionally by all. That too, a utilitarian could argue, is an ethical imperative. At the moment, however, such foreign aid is miniscule compared to the need, and also (despite some persistent misconceptions) miniscule relative to the resources of affluent countries like the United States. The U.S. contribution to global food and health aid, for instance,

does not even meet the very modest United Nations recommended target of 0.7 percent of Gross National Product. Currently our rate is 0.09 percent—a tiny 135th of our military budget—not even half of Japan’s 0.22 percent or a tenth of Denmark’s 0.97 percent.

Thus, just as we cannot count on other individuals, situated as we are, to do their parts, neither can we count on our government to step up to the task, at least as things stand today. Presumably the argument therefore also requires that we get involved politically to try to change American budget priority in the future. In the meantime, however, the need remains, as does our individual capacity to address it directly.

Singer does not deny that morality asks of us a sacrifice of sorts here. We all could live more luxuriously and conveniently if we spent that money on ourselves or our families. There are genuine pleasures we will have to forgo. The analogy to Bob and his Bugatti is carefully constructed: Bob too pays a price. But if the moral life can be tough, Singer says, that is just the way things are. We should be thankful that we somehow lucked into being on the giving end instead of on the needy end—since from the moral point of view it could just as easily have been the other way around.

Nor is anything particularly imposing really being asked of us—certainly nothing like the costs potential recipients are suffering now. A used car, kept longer, rather than a new one, will get us around just as well. Not dropping \$50 or \$100 for a restaurant meal will not kill us. Singer is not even requiring any particular percentage of “tithe.” He himself now gives about one quarter of his income to famine-relief agencies, a level he says he hopes to increase still further, but the amount will vary with different people’s situations. The question to all of us is how much we truly need, not how little we can get away with giving or whether some preset amount is enough. Singer reports that from the first time he saw appeals in the newspapers or on TV to help starving people, he wondered why people were asked to donate so very little. Why indeed.

EVALUATING THE ARGUMENT

Your first challenge is to make sure you understand Singer’s argument. The case is not necessarily just utilitarian, but for our purposes you might concentrate on the utilitarian basics. (Part of the strength of Singer’s argument, indeed, is that the very basics are all he thinks we need.) To be sure you have it right, write Singer’s main argument over in your own words. Try to put it as clearly and simply as possible. You might even try it out on a few people to be sure you have succeeded—and take note of their reactions.

Once you have outlined and understood Singer’s argument, your task is to analyze and evaluate it. What do you think are the likely objections to it? How do you think Singer would respond?

As you consider objections, keep in mind the families of values we have been reviewing. Some objections will likely be from a utilitarian point of view: that is, they will share Singer’s starting point. Is it true, for example, that giving away substantial chunks of our income will have the strongly positive net benefits Singer projects? Why or why not? Are they the best possible consequences achievable with that money? (If they aren’t, according to you, what would be? Shouldn’t we therefore give substantial amounts of money for *those* purposes, then?)

Or might the problems with Singer’s argument (if there are such) trace back to utilitarianism itself? Traditionally it is the Ethics of the Person that stands most clearly in opposition to utilitarian thinking. Utilitarianism, as we’ve seen, makes a somewhat conditional defense of rights, for example. Perhaps we have *rights* to do with our income as we please, even if the consequences of not doing something else with it are very bad for some other

people. What would it take to work out this response? (You might also check out the critical literature in response to Singer.)

On the other hand, is Singer denying this? He's not for *forcing* people to make such major donations, is he? Though there could be a question of taxes. . . .

Then again, maybe the Ethics of the Person could also make a case, even as strong a case as Singer's, for donating money to help save others' lives. Maybe those others are the ones with the really pressing or relevant rights. Or maybe it is not really a question of rights at all, but of respect for persons understood in a somewhat different way. Don't assume, anyway, that a case against utilitarianism disposes of Singer's challenge: it may recur from the point of view of other families of values as well. For example, if you also did Going Farther #7, consider the question from the perspective of John Rawls's theory of justice.

Consider setting up a symposium or some other whole-class ways of bringing your thoughts to your classmates and working them through together. Remember that your task is still exploratory. You don't have to come up with some final and definitive view about these questions. On the other hand, they are not just abstract, either. There are many ways to help others in need, right around us and right now, and it certainly would not hurt to make it part of your questioning, whatever you conclude, to ask how you might find at least some immediate and unobjectionable ways to do so, on whatever scale you think appropriate.

NOTE

For Singer's full argument, see his book *The Life You Can Save: Acting Now to End World Poverty* (Random House, 2009), and for more of his writings in general, see <http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/>. See also the FAQ page of his website. Full text of "The Singer Solution to World Poverty" can be found online at <http://www.utilitarian.net/singer/by/19990905.htm>.



The Ethics of Virtue

The moral values gathered in the Ethics of Virtue spotlight and uphold values of character: a variety of specific values bearing on our individual traits and dispositions. As such, the Ethics of Virtue is an older ethical tradition, quite different and also more widespread, globally and historically, than either the Ethics of Happiness or the Ethics of Persons. Here the key moral question is not (or not immediately) *What should I do?* but rather *What kind of person should I be?*

Chapter 4 summarized the Ethics of Virtue like this:

V I R T U E

The Ethics of Virtue encompasses those moral values concerned with *character*: with traits like self-discipline, responsibility, honesty, charity, loyalty, devotion. Classical Western antiquity traditionally identified four “cardinal” or “natural” virtues of justice, temperance, prudence, and courage. The Christian tradition added the three “theological” virtues of faith, hope, and charity. Classical Eastern traditions highlight virtues such as tranquility, non-attachment, compassion, right livelihood, and nonviolence.

Let us now explore the Ethics of Virtue in more detail.

AN ABUNDANCE OF VIRTUES

Character traits are specific and varied. The usual lists of moral virtues therefore tend to be long and lovingly detailed. For starters, here are eighty (!) or so:

acceptance, altruism, appreciation, autonomy, awareness, charity, chastity, cleanliness, compassion, continence (i.e., sexual self-discipline),

cooperation, courage, courtesy, creativity, dependability, diligence, discipline, empathy, endurance, enthusiasm, fairness, faith, fidelity, foresight, forgiveness, fortitude, freedom, friendship, generosity, helpfulness, honesty, honor, hope, hospitality, humility, humor, idealism, imagination, independence, innocence, integrity, kindness, knowledge, love, loyalty, mercy, moderation, manners, modesty, nonviolence, nurturance, obedience, openness, optimism, patience, peacefulness, perseverance, piety, prudence, purpose, respect, social responsibility, restraint, sacrifice, self-awareness, self-discipline, self-esteem, self-reliance, sensitivity, sharing, sincerity, spirituality, sympathy, tact, temperance, tolerance, trustworthiness, truthfulness, understanding, wisdom . . .

Even this list is far from complete. On other lists you find lightheartedness, neighborliness, valor, liberality. My mother would insist that I add politeness. The familiar “work ethic” is primarily a system of virtues: hard work, frugality, persistence, self-reliance, thrift, industriousness, dependability. Eastern moralists stress tranquility, non-attachment, compassion. People speak of still other virtues in specific contexts, in business or sports, for example. And the list changes over time, as societies evolve and understandings shift.

Vices—broadly, the opposite of virtues—can also be listed in equally loving and concrete detail. Indeed, vice terms may even be more precise and vivid than virtue terms. A short list from the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* includes such terms as

irresponsible, feckless, lazy, inconsiderate, uncooperative, harsh, intolerant, selfish, mercenary, indiscreet, tactless, arrogant, unsympathetic, cold, incautious, unenterprising, pusillanimous, feeble, presumptuous, rude, hypocritical, self-indulgent, materialistic, grasping, short-sighted, vindictive, calculating, ungrateful, grudging, brutal, profligate, disloyal. . . .

Any particular item on these lists may also be contested. Not every society affirms every single one of them as moral virtues or even as virtues at all. You yourself may have doubts about some of them. Still, they are all at least recognizable. Even when specific virtues conflict, as they sometimes do—obedience versus independence, empathy versus fairness, humor versus sensitivity—we do not feel the need to reject one or the other. It’s just that another virtue is *balance*: finding good ways to keep them all in play.

BASIC VIRTUES (AND VICES)

Are some virtues more basic than others? The classical Greeks emphasized four basic virtues: temperance, prudence, courage, and justice. When Greek philosophy was Christianized, three “theological” virtues were added: faith, hope, and charity, getting us to medieval Catholicism’s key seven: faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude. In Islam, the traditional

basic virtues are strikingly similar to the classical Greeks: wisdom, courage, chastity, justice—each representing a basic power of the soul appropriately purified and trained.

Among moderns, the Catholic philosopher and scholar of virtue Josef Pieper (1904–1997) categorized Western virtues into three general categories: virtues of *self-control*, such as temperance and other forms of self-restraint and self-redirection; virtues of *self-efficacy*, such as persistence and courage; and virtues of *regard*, such as justice and fairness. William Bennett, former U.S. Secretary of Education and advocate of character education, lists ten key virtues, under which he argues many others fall: self-discipline, compassion, responsibility, friendship, work, courage, perseverance, honesty, loyalty, and faith.

In the Islamic conception, each of the basic virtues has a corresponding vice: ignorance instead of wisdom, cowardice in place of courage, concupiscence (gluttony and lust) in place of chastity, and injustice and tyranny in place of justice. Each vice is supposed to represent a basic power of the soul gone awry. Medieval Catholicism's Seven Deadly Sins are pride, wrath, envy, lust, gluttony, avarice, and sloth. Note these are not the exact reverses of the key virtues, though there are lists that emphasize parallels: temperance opposite gluttony, humility opposite pride, service opposite avarice. I have seen yet other traits listed as vices, more modern and secular: gracelessness, insensitivity, discontent, insatiability, willful ignorance or denial, crudeness, bad temper, even discouragement. In general, Christian moral tradition distinguishes two basic kinds of vice: those we owe to the body, such as lust, and those that are spiritual perversities, like blasphemy or pride, which are seen as false idolatries. False idolatries are supposed to be much worse than merely perverse instincts—although they too are sinful. Pride was supposed to be the worst of all. Essentially a kind of idolatry of the self, pride was thought to bring the worst evils into being.

TOWARD A PHILOSOPHY OF THE VIRTUES

Notice that we have moved from lists of virtues to questions about their interrelationships and classifications. These questions can—in fact, must—become quite deep.

In particular, what *makes* something a virtue? In practice, people seem to be tempted simply to declare that certain things are virtues and then enthusiastically start listing them. There seems to be much less reflection on why some character trait is a virtue in the first place, that is, about what makes a virtue a virtue (and a vice a vice). How do we really tell which are which?

This challenge is compounded by another problem you have probably already noticed. Though there is a significant overlap in different lists of virtues, there is also significant variation. In some cultures, for example, deference to authority is a prime virtue, while in others, independence of thought

and expression is considered much more virtuous. Meanwhile, unfortunately, all manner of outdated customs and prejudices also shape our views of virtues. Mention chastity, for example, and we cannot help but remember that there is also a good bit of prejudice, prudery, and sexual double-standard involved in traditional talk about virtues. Critical reconsideration would be a good idea. But then we have to ask: What really does make something a virtue?

You know how utilitarians would answer. A character trait is a virtue, they'd say, if it makes people happier on the whole and in the long run—if it serves the greatest good of the greatest number.

There is surely something to this. It might even be true that, on the whole, virtue does promote happiness and vice causes misery. On the other hand, even if the virtues do make us happier and vices unhappier, that may not be the *reason* that they are virtues or vices. The virtues' advocates would say that the virtues are the kinds of character traits that we *ought* to seek and to sustain, maybe because they flow from something very deep in human nature, or because they meet certain legitimate expectations—perhaps of others, perhaps of God's. If so, then the real relation between virtue and happiness may be the other way around: maybe the virtues make us happy because they are virtues, rather than being virtues because they make us happy.

Something more may be going on. We have a genuinely different set of values here. There is more of a story to tell.

A GREEK VIEW OF VIRTUE

The most influential Western theory of the virtues comes from the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BCE).

Everything in the world, according to Aristotle, has a distinctive and essential function or activity. Trees grow in certain ways depending on their kinds; buildings are made for certain purposes; human artisans have their particular arts. And in Aristotle's view, this function or activity in turn determines admirable or "excellent" characteristics or traits—that is, virtues.

"For all things that have a function or activity," Aristotle writes, "the good and the 'well' [as in: doing a job well] is thought to reside in the function." Good carpenters, for example, are those who build sturdy and beautiful things. Therefore virtue in carpenters is an eye for proportion, skill with saw and plane, a feel for what a piece of wood can and cannot do, and so on.

Similarly, there must be a characteristic or set of characteristics that defines *our* essence—the human "function," as Aristotle also puts it:

For just as for a flute player, a sculptor, or any artist, and, in general, for all things that have a function or activity, the good and the "well" is thought to reside in the function, so it would seem to be for man, if he has a function.

According to Aristotle, rational self-regulation is the characteristic activity and therefore “function” of humans. We are, in his famous definition, *rational animals*. What Aristotle means by “rational,” though, is quite different from what Kant meant by the same word, 2,000 or so years later. For Aristotle, reason means the ability—the habits and the wisdom and the judgment—that enables us to bring a complex self into order as it unfolds.

This state of humanly-appropriate activity Aristotle calls *Eudaimonia*—a difficult term to translate. Typically it is rendered as “happiness” (as in Reading 16, to follow), but notice that it is once again very different from the stereotypical passive or spectator-like pleasure of popular (and, dare I say, consumerist?) society. It is a holistic and active, fully-engaged state of being. More accurately by way of Aristotle, we might call it “self-realization,” with the understanding that the “self” being realized is the rational part of our natures, which Aristotle considers the “highest” part—it is not necessarily personal.

This essentially human function and activity in turn therefore determines morally admirable or “excellent” characteristics or traits for us—in short, moral virtues. For example, one key activity of practical reason is to find the “mean”—the appropriate middle—between extremes of emotion or action. In responding to danger we may feel either fear or confidence, leading to two opposite failings: either cowardice (too much fear, too little confidence) or foolhardiness (too much confidence, too little fear). We need to find the appropriate, rational middle—and this is the virtue, says Aristotle, of courage. The vices, on this view, are the *excesses* (too much) or the *defects* (too little): that is, going to the extreme—either extreme—rather than following the middle path of moderation.

Likewise, between excessive self-indulgence or profligacy on one hand and self-denial on the other lies the mean of temperance. Between the defect of miserliness and the excess of prodigality lies the mean or virtue Aristotle calls “liberality.” Between vanity on the one hand and undue humility on the other lies the virtue he calls “high-mindedness.” Even a sense of humor is a virtue on this view—the mean between being foolish and being a bore.

READING 16

From *Nichomachean Ethics*

ARISTOTLE

ARISTOTLE (384–322 BCE) was one of the greatest of ancient Greek philosophers. His thinking spanned many subjects, including sciences such as physics, biology, and zoology, where he pioneered elaborate taxonomic systems; philosophical topics

such as logic and aesthetics as well as ethics (he even started some philosophical fields, like metaphysics); as well as poetry, theater, music, rhetoric, linguistics, politics, and government. Taken together his work is considered the first comprehensive system of Western philosophy.

Aristotle began at age 17 as a student of Plato, the other of the greatest ancient Greek philosophers, with whom he stayed for twenty years or so. Later he became tutor to Alexander, son of King Philip of Macedon and later to become Alexander “the Great,” as well as to two other future kings. Alexander later supported Aristotle’s scientific investigations by sending him specimen animals from his far-flung voyages and conquests, though apparently they fell out in later years, and after Alexander’s early death anti-Macedonian feeling in Athens led Aristotle to seek exile for a time. Aristotle was also well known among medieval Muslim intellectuals who revered him as “The First Teacher.”

Nicomachean Ethics is Aristotle’s best-known work on ethics. The title probably refers to Aristotle’s son Nichomachus, to whom the work might have been dedicated, or to his father, who had the same name.

If, then, there is some end of the things we do, which we desire for its own sake (everything else being desired for the sake of this), and if we do not choose everything for the sake of something else (for at that rate the process would go on to infinity, so that our desire would be empty and vain), clearly this must be the good and the chief good. Will not the knowledge of it, then, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what is right? If so, we must try in outline at least to determine what it is, and of which of the sciences or capacities it is the object. . . .

Verbally there is very general agreement, for both the general run of men and people of superior refinement say that it is happiness, and identify living well and doing well with being happy, but with regard to what happiness is they differ, and the many do not give the same account as the wise. For the former think it is some plain and obvious thing, like pleasure, wealth, or honor; they differ, however, from one another—and often even the same man identifies it with different things, with health when he is ill, and wealth when he is poor, but, conscious of their ignorance, they admire those who proclaim some great ideal that is above their comprehension. . . .

From Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by W.D. Ross, Book I, 1097b23–1098a19. By permission Oxford University Press.

Presumably, however, to say that happiness is the chief good seems a platitude, and a clearer account of what it is is still desired. This might perhaps be given, if we could first ascertain the function of man. For just as for a flute player, a sculptor, or any artist, and, in general, for all things that have a function or activity, the good and the "well" is thought to reside in the function, so would it seem to be for man, if he has a function. Have the carpenter, then, and the tanner certain functions or activities, and has man none? Is he born without a function? Or as eye, hand, foot, and in general each of the parts evidently has a function, may one lay it down that man similarly has a function apart from all these? What then can this be?

Life seems to be common even to plants, but we are seeking what is peculiar to man. Let us exclude, therefore, the life of nutrition and growth. Next there would be a life of perception, but it also seems to be common even to the horse, the ox, and every animal.

There remains, then, an active life of the element that has a rational principle; of this, one part has such a principle in the sense of being obedient to one, the other in the sense of possessing one and exercising thought. And, as "life of the rational element" also has two meanings, we must state that life in the sense of activity is what we mean; for this seems to be the more proper sense of the term.

Now if the function of man is an activity of soul which follows or implies a rational principle, and if we say "a so-and-so" and "a good so-and-so" have a function which is the same in kind, for example, a lyre player and a good lyre player, and so without qualification in all cases, eminence in respect of goodness being added to the name of the function (for the function of a lyre player is to play the lyre, and that of a good lyre player is to do so well): if this is the case, [and we state the function of man to be a certain kind of life, and this to be an activity or actions of the soul implying a rational principle, and the function of a good man to be the good and noble performance of these, and if any action is well performed when it is performed in accordance with the appropriate excellence: if this is the case,] human good turns out to be activity of soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are more than one virtue, in accordance with the best and most complete.

But we must add "in a complete life." For one swallow does not make a summer, nor does one day; and so too one day, or a short time, does not make a man blessed and happy. . . .

We must . . . not only describe [moral] virtue as a state of character, but also say what sort of state it is. We may remark, then, that every virtue or excellence both brings into good condition the thing of which it is the excellence and makes the work of that thing be done well; e.g., the excellence of the eye makes both the eye and

its work good; for it is by the excellence of the eye that we see well. Similarly the excellence of the horse makes a horse both good in itself and good at running and at carrying its rider and at awaiting the attack of the enemy.

Therefore, if this is true in every case, the virtue of man also will be the state of character which makes a man good and which makes him do his own work well . . .

If reason is divine, then, in comparison with man, the life according to it is divine in comparison with human life. But we must not follow those who advise us, being men, to think of human things, and, being mortal, of mortal things, but must, so far as we can, make ourselves immortal, and strain every nerve to live in accordance with the best thing in us; for even if it be small in bulk, much more does it in power and worth surpass everything. This would seem, too, to be each man himself, since it is the authoritative and better part of him. It would be strange, then, if he were to choose not the life of his self but that of something else. And what we said before will apply now; that which is proper to each thing is by nature best and most pleasant for each thing; for man, therefore, the life according to reason is best and pleasantest, since reason more than anything else is man. This life therefore is also the happiest.

AQUINAS ON THE VIRTUES

Aristotle deeply influenced medieval Christian thinkers such as Saint Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274). Aquinas borrowed Aristotle’s “logic of virtue,” so to speak—deriving virtue from our essential activity or function—but understood our essential activity or function in very different terms. In particular, reason is not an end in itself, for Aquinas, but instead a means to better knowing ourselves and God. Our ultimate purpose he supposes to be communion with God, as far as we can achieve it in this life.

Here we begin to see the underlying rationale for the Christian systems of virtue so prominent in the lists like the key, or “cardinal,” virtues given earlier. It was Aquinas who added the “theological” virtues of faith, hope, and charity to the older Greek, or “natural,” virtues like justice and temperance. Those Greek virtues were also expanded. Temperance, for example, came to include humility, patience, and chastity. All of them are now conceived as character traits essential to drawing and staying as close to God as we can in this life.

The Seven Deadly Sins, meanwhile, were those traits considered fatal to that same spiritual quest. Pride, lust, avarice, and all the rest: to fall into these pits was a sure way of allowing yourself to be pulled away from God,

and thus to fail not only to meet God's legitimate expectations but also to fail as a human being: to fall away from our own deepest and most essential possibilities and nature.

PROFESSIONAL ETHICS:
ARISTOTELIAN VIRTUE ETHICS IN PRACTICE

Aristotle speaks of carpenters and tanners, whose work defines their goals and therefore their virtues *as* carpenters or tanners. Likewise for teachers and doctors and athletes and (why not?) car mechanics and computer programmers and fund-raisers. Each of these professions or activities we entrust with important things; each of them therefore has a moral dimension; and for each of them, just as by now you'd expect, their moral dimension is determined by their specific function or goal—just as Aristotle proposes. Teachers enable and inform; doctors heal; athletes must “play fair”; and so on.

Here virtue is determined by what contemporary philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre calls “practices.” Medicine, teaching, and so on are practices, like many other organized, cooperative activities—politics, child-raising, even games. Each of these activities or disciplines has its own “internal goods”—goals that define the practice itself, such as health and life for medicine, justice for the law, and so on. Thus, technically, on MacIntyre's view, a virtue is

an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.

Devotion to the truth, for example, enables lawyers to seek justice. Cool-headedness enables chess masters to concentrate. Liveliness and imagination make a good teacher.

Consider medicine in a little more detail. Doctors' famous oath traces back to Hippocrates, a Greek physician of the fifth century BCE. The core of the Hippocratic Oath reads

I will apply dietetic measures for the benefit of the sick according to my ability and judgement; I will keep them from harm and injustice.

I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody if asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect. . . . In purity and holiness I will guard my life and my art.

Whatever houses I may visit, I will come for the benefit of the sick. . . .

What I may see or hear in the course of the treatment . . . which on no account one must spread abroad, I will keep to myself. . . .

There are more modern medical codes of ethics too. The Hippocratic Oath does not deal with questions of truthfulness, for example, but the American Medical Association (AMA) Principles of Medical Ethics requires

that “A physician shall uphold the standards of professionalism, be honest in all professional interactions” and even “strive to report physicians deficient in character or competence.” The International Council of Nurses Ethical Code and the Constitution of the World Health Organization require “respect for life . . . unrestricted by considerations of nationality, race, creed, age, sex, politics, or social status.”

Many codes also oblige the medical professional to try to improve the profession, including “establish[ing] and maintain[ing] equitable social and economic working conditions” (International Council of Nurses), as well as contributing to the community at large. The AMA again: “A physician shall recognize a responsibility to participate in activities contributing to the improvement of the community and the betterment of public health.”

These codes make explicit the virtues of a good doctor or nurse—and they begin to show us how these virtues flow from what MacIntyre would call the “internal goods” of medicine considered as a “practice.” Medicine serves health—it is practiced “for the benefit of the sick”—therefore medical professionals must put their patients’ health above all other goals, including the professional’s own enjoyments or income, and even sometimes personal safety. The doctor must above all “do no harm.” A doctor also enters a person’s life at moments of great vulnerability—sickness and death—and is therefore legitimately expected to show the utmost respect for the patient and all of his family and household, including confidentiality. “What I may see or hear in the course of the treatment . . . I will keep to myself.”

The Hippocratic Oath clearly has some outdated parts. Would-be Hippocratic doctors also promised not to do surgery (in Greek times that was another profession’s work) or seek sex with household slaves. Other parts are currently in contest: Hippocratic doctors also swear not to give “abortive remedies” or, as we just saw, “deadly drugs.” Still, the oath remains in use—it still speaks to us—because it identifies the key virtues of medicine against the background of medicine’s *function*, or medicine as a *practice*. Aristotle’s and MacIntyre’s logic is still at work.

Once you understand professional codes of ethics in this way, you can outline the virtues for almost any profession. Teachers nurture the young, open minds, inform and enable: hence teachers must be supportive, must not indoctrinate, should be accurate and clear, and so on. Airline pilots must remain alert at all times and keep themselves well-trained and ready. Same for truck drivers. Accountants must be objective, avoid conflicts of interest, and report clearly and accurately.

Or consider journalism. The aim of journalism is to inform people and by so doing to help promote democratic decision making. Therefore telling the truth is crucial. An attempt to present both (all) sides of a dispute is crucial too, especially when most of the established powers stand on one side. Careful distinction between news and “advocacy” allows people to make up their own minds.

Members of the Society of Professional Journalists believe that public enlightenment is the forerunner of justice and the foundation of democracy. The duty of the journalist is to further those ends by seeking truth and providing a fair and comprehensive account of events and issues. . . . Journalists should be honest, fair, and courageous in gathering, reporting, and interpreting information. . . .

Again all of these are quite literally *virtues*; and again the proposed list of virtues is inferred directly from the “internal goods” of the profession.

CHINESE VIEWS OF VIRTUE

On the other side of Eurasia from ancient Greece, at about the same time, three great philosophical and ethical systems were taking shape. All of these systems concentrate on the virtues as well.

CONFUCIAN VIRTUE: PROPRIETY AND PIETY

For the Chinese sage Confucius (551–479 BCE), the greatest virtue is humanity (*jen* or *ren*, variously translated as humaneness, kindheartedness, or benevolence). Associated virtues are just or appropriate action, ritual propriety (and not just going through the motions but truly seeing to the heart of the ritual), wisdom, loyalty, faithfulness, trustworthiness, courtesy, magnanimity, good faith, diligence, and piety.

On the Confucian view, these are all legitimate expectations deriving from *relationship*. Our task is not so much to live up to our own inner nature, as Aristotle thought, as to live up to the requirements of the relationships within which we find ourselves. We stand among the generations, for example: we are children to our parents and at the same time parents to our own children. (Remember: “Remember who you are!”) More generally, we find ourselves among a variety of relationships, all with their histories and rituals and depth, and therefore associated virtues. We are citizen and ruler: here the prime virtue is righteousness. We are sibling among siblings: here the prime virtue is order. We are friend among friends: here the prime virtue is faithfulness. These virtues make possible a harmonious society—very unlike the constantly warring and fractured Chinese society of Confucius’s time—and likewise a harmonious society allows us to cultivate the virtues.

Confucius spent his middle life traveling throughout China trying to persuade various rulers to put his ideas into effect. Unsuccessful in his lifetime—he eventually gave up and went home—he nevertheless would have been happy to know that a version of his ideas eventually became the official Chinese system, literally for millennia. Virtue was the essential—and at times the only—requirement for serving the Chinese state. It was

Confucius's radical idea that heredity is not enough: even a high-born man can be but a "small man" without virtue. Contrariwise, any person who cultivates virtue or "humaneness" can become truly noble and worthy to lead.

BUDDHISM AND TAOISM

Buddhism was founded in India by Siddhartha Gautama (most likely fifth century BCE), called "the Buddha," meaning "the Enlightened One." Buddhism flourished in India, spread to China and Japan, and reached the ancient Western world—Greece—as well.

What we call "self," the Buddha taught, is really only an imagined entity, not any kind of permanence but only a flux. We are different today than we were yesterday or will be tomorrow. In fact, to be attached to a supposedly permanent "I" only leads to suffering because change and eventually death are inevitable. Really we are just a part of the ceaseless becoming of the whole universe—a beautiful thing, too, but a fact that calls for awareness, acceptance, and adjustment, not resistance or dramatic gestures.

Here we begin to glimpse a very different view of the virtues—different both from the self-actualizing virtues of Aristotle and the society-centered virtues of Confucius. In a Buddhist view, the key virtues are traits like tranquility, non-attachment, compassion, truthful speech and thought, "right livelihood" (which means finding a way to live that does not increase your own or others' suffering), and nonviolence. These are all ways of living in appropriate relationship with the world as it really is and of freeing ourselves from "craving." Desire in the Buddhist view is not so much the having of desires as it is the desire having *us*. We are invited instead to try not only to free ourselves from craving but also to free others as well.

Free from craving, Buddhists say, we can rejoin the world on its own terms. "To forget the Self is to be enlightened by all things," the Japanese Zen master Dogen wrote, and "To be enlightened by all things is to remove the barrier between the Self and Other." But how do we know what the world's terms actually are? The answer, especially for Taoism, is to look at the workings of *nature*—not the human world, which is usually a distraction and often a hyperstimulation of craving, but the workings of winds and streams, mountains and forests.

A prominent analogy in the *Tao Te Ching* is the working of water. To be virtuous, in fact, is to be very much like water: to be infinitely flexible and responsive, "going with the flow," a life based on spontaneity, simplicity, tranquility, unselfishness, and humility. It is not, however, *weak*. The *Tao Te Ching* notes that though nothing in the world is as soft and yielding as water, "yet nothing can better overcome the hard and the strong."

According to the book of Chuang-tzu, an old man is seen by some followers of Confucius swimming in a raging torrent; suddenly, he disappears. The

pupils of Confucius rush to save him, but the man reaches the bank entirely unaided. Asked how he had pulled off this remarkable feat of survival, the man replied that he had simply let himself go with the descending and ascending currents in the water. The true Taoist, in other words, moulds his senses, body and mind until they are at one with the currents of the world without.

Notice the “letting go” as well. We don’t have to resist the world. In fact, we can’t. Resistance will only get us drowned, so to speak. Even fighting is not really a matter of meeting blow for blow, irresistible force meeting immovable object. The wisdom of the martial arts: if someone is rushing at you to fight, don’t rush back at them. Step aside and let them rush past, but maybe just change their direction a little as you do. “Tao abides in non-action. Yet nothing is left undone.”

And the Tao itself? The *Tao Te Ching* opens with these words:

The Tao that can be told
is not the eternal Tao
The name that can be named
is not the eternal Name . . .

We sense, in short, a vast and all-encompassing reality, which at some level just is the whole world considered all together, but nothing that can be pinned down, labeled and dissected and analyzed. The Tao is not God; it is not personal, or even unchanging; and it is not to be worshiped. It is not graspable in language yet can be clear enough when we sit with a clear mind by a peaceful stream—or, just as well, enter a raging current. To be sure, life will offer us both.

READING 17

From the *Tao Te Ching*

LAO TSU

TRANSLATED BY STEPHEN MITCHELL

THE TAO TE CHING is the founding expression of Taoism and the second most translated book in the world. It was written, officially, by Lao Tsu in third or fourth century BCE China. But so little is known about Lao Tsu that it is not even clear whether such a person actually existed. One story is that a bridgekeeper asked the wanderer Lao Tsu to write a book containing his thoughts and beliefs, which he did—and then disappeared forever. Other

stories, perhaps not inconsistent with this one, consider the author of the *Tao* a divine being.

Tao literally means “way” or “path.” *Te* means “virtue,” both in the sense of “personal character” and in the sense of “inner potency,” as when we speak of the “healing virtue” of a drug. *Ching* originally meant “norm” but expanded to mean “scripture,” “canon,” or “classic.” Thus, *Tao Te Ching* means something like: “The Scripture/Classic/Canon of the Way/Path and the Power/Virtue.”

8

The supreme good is like water,
which nourishes all things without trying to.
It is content with the low places that people disdain.
Thus it is like the Tao.

In dwelling, live close to the ground.
In thinking, keep to the simple.
In conflict, be fair and generous.
In governing, don't try to control.
In work, do what you enjoy.
In family life, be completely present.

When you are content to be simply yourself
and don't compare or compete,
everybody will respect you.

10

Can you coax your mind from its wandering
and keep to the original oneness?
Can you let your body become
supple as a newborn child's?
Can you cleanse your inner vision
until you see nothing but the light?
Can you love people and lead them
without imposing your will?
Can you deal with the most vital matters

#s 8, 10, 16, 22, 23, 24, 49, 67 from TAO TE CHING BY LAO TZU, A NEW ENGLISH VERSION, WITH FOREWORD AND NOTES, by STEPHEN MITCHELL. Translation © 1988 by Stephen Mitchell. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers.

by letting events take their course?
Can you step back from your own mind
and thus understand all things?

Giving birth and nourishing,
having without possessing,
acting with no expectations,
leading and not trying to control:
this is the supreme virtue.

16

Empty your mind of all thoughts.
Let your heart be at peace.
Watch the turmoil of beings,
but contemplate their return.

Each separate being in the universe
returns to the common source.
Returning to the source is serenity.

If you don't realize the source,
you stumble in confusion and sorrow.
When you realize where you come from,
you naturally become tolerant,
disinterested, amused,
kindhearted as a grandmother,
dignified as a king.
Immersed in the wonder of the Tao,
you can deal with whatever life brings you,
and when death comes, you are ready.

22

If you want to become whole,
let yourself be partial.
If you want to become straight,
let yourself be crooked.
If you want to become full,
let yourself be empty.
If you want to be reborn,
let yourself die.
If you want to be given everything,
give everything up.

The Master, by residing in the Tao,
 sets an example for all beings.
 Because he doesn't display himself,
 people can see his light.
 Because he has nothing to prove,
 people can trust his words.
 Because he doesn't know who he is,
 people recognize themselves in him.
 Because he has no goal in mind,
 everything he does succeeds.

When the ancient Masters said,
 "If you want to be given everything,
 give everything up,"
 they weren't using empty phrases.
 Only in being lived by the Tao can you be truly yourself.

23

Express yourself completely,
 then keep quiet.
 Be like the forces of nature:
 when it blows, there is only wind;
 when it rains, there is only rain;
 when the clouds pass, the sun shines through.

If you open yourself to the Tao,
 you are at one with the Tao
 and you can embody it completely.
 If you open yourself to insight,
 you are at one with insight
 and you can use it completely.
 If you open yourself to loss,
 you are at one with loss
 and you can accept it completely.

Open yourself to the Tao,
 then trust your natural responses;
 and everything will fall into place.

24

He who stands on tiptoe
 doesn't stand firm.

He who rushes ahead
 doesn't go far.
 He who tries to shine
 dims his own light.
 He who defines himself
 can't know who he really is.
 He who has power over others
 can't empower himself.
 He who clings to his work
 will create nothing that endures.

If you want to accord with the Tao,
 just do your job, then let go.

49

The Master . . . is good to people who are good.
 She is also good to people who aren't good.
 This is true goodness.

She trusts people who are trustworthy.
 She also trusts people who aren't trustworthy.
 This is true trust . . .

67

Some say that my teaching is nonsense.
 Others call it lofty but impractical.
 But to those who have looked inside themselves,
 this nonsense makes perfect sense.
 And to those who put it into practice,
 this loftiness has roots that go deep.

I have just three things to teach:
 simplicity, patience, compassion.
 These three are your greatest treasures.
 Simple in actions and in thoughts,
 you return to the source of being.
 Patient with both friends and enemies,
 you accord with the way things are.
 Compassionate toward yourself,
 you reconcile all beings in the world.

CULTIVATING VIRTUE

The Ethics of Virtue is concerned with character traits. But character traits do not just happen. They need to be consciously developed and sustained, both by the people whose character traits they are and by others around them: parents, teachers, role models, and the community at large. A little like plants, they need seeding and nurturing and regular attention in order to prosper. This is what is called the *cultivation* of the virtues.

HOW VIRTUE IS TAUGHT

To some extent the virtues can be taught directly. They can be identified, praised, and rewarded early on, by parents and later by schools and society. Discipline is a good example. Originally imposed from outside, it is gradually internalized to become, later, *self-discipline*. Not that this kind of parenting or teaching is easy—and obviously I am not talking about the kind of harshness that really serves the discipliner and not the learner—but surely it is also crucial.

Stories play an essential role too. William Bennett, former U.S. Secretary of Education and compiler of several large books of virtue stories, writes in the preface of one of them that

what we choose to read to our children matters a great deal. Legends, folktales, sacred stories, biographies, and poems can introduce the youngest children to the virtues; they can clarify notions of right and wrong for young people; and they can serve as powerful reminders of [humanity's] best ideals all the way through adulthood. More than one great man or woman at a critical instant has recalled a simple fable, a familiar verse, a childhood hero.

Other virtues must come from the heart, of course—empathy, generosity, hospitality—but even here, early experience of these virtues in others may be a critical part of the learning. Or perhaps they are “innate,” but even so, it’s clear that people can *lose* them without the proper development and support.

For Confucius too, cultivating the virtues is a social project. Virtuous rulers and other role models, in particular, are crucial. Virtue is not something we discover for ourselves; it is *shown* to us, daily, in the actions of those most visible and most admired. Classic texts reinforce virtues; art and story celebrate them. In China, ultimately the entire society came to be built around the virtues of its officials. By 165 BCE, candidates for high public office began to be called for examination of their moral excellence by the emperor. More and more were examined until finally almost anyone who wished to become an official had to pass written examinations, and thus it went for centuries. This Confucian system even inspired the modern European civil service.

“It takes a village” then—maybe even a whole society—to nurture and sustain the virtues. Aristotle would invoke the city, or *polis*. Remember that “cities” for the Greeks were self-sufficient political entities, city-states, not

parts of any larger nation. Governance was face-to-face, and everyone in the ruling class (landowning, free, male citizens, often also those who fought the city's wars) knew each other intimately. When you grow up and fight and decide alongside others in this way, visibly interdependent though distinctive personalities, everyone's virtues and vices are well known to all, and a man's training of his sons (and sometimes protégés) clearly reflects his own virtue—or lack of it. Everyone could tell. Conversely, some observers have argued that the decline of such face-to-face communities in modern societies underlies our (perceived) decline in virtue as well.

PRACTICE IS ESSENTIAL

In the individual moral life especially, *practice* is crucial to cultivating virtue. Think psychologically for a moment here. A character trait is (at least) a reliable disposition to act in certain ways in certain specific circumstances. Another term we could use is “habit.” But habits need practicing. The simplest principle of psychology is that habits are established and grow stronger with repetition. So, to promote and engrain virtue in oneself, repetition is key. Honesty, hospitality, temperance, and all the rest—we don't come by these settled character traits simply by choice or commitment. We have to *be* honest, *be* hospitable, *practice* temperance—again and again and again.

Sometimes we are inclined to excuse our moral lapses by arguing that we couldn't help ourselves. “Circumstances made me do it!” And it may well be true that, faced with specific temptations with no settled habits of resistance or redirection, temptations are hard to resist. Too much liquor, the white lie or worse, the habit of denigrating others behind their backs, or much worse: all of these can come out all too easily. But here is the key point: the contrary power does not necessarily lie in a pure act of will at the moment of choice, as if each time we must “just say no” all over again. The power lies with the reconstruction of our habits. Make it a *habit* never to say something behind someone's back that you wouldn't say to their face, and each time it becomes easier. Moral character is an ongoing project.

READING 18

From *Living Large*

JOHN SULLIVAN

JOHN SULLIVAN (b. 1937) is a professor emeritus of philosophy at Elon University and a mentor and inspiration to me and many others. He works, as he puts it, “at the place where philosophy, psychology and spirituality—East and West—intersect and mutually enhance one another.”

In this selection from his 2004 book *Living Large*, Sullivan's question is how to win ourselves some freedom of mind. Awareness, he argues, is crucial. What Sullivan calls *response-ability* arises when we come to recognize that our ways of understanding and responding to events and experiences are themselves choices—and when we then practice making different and more conscious ones. Response-ability is both a key virtue in itself and also the means by which other virtues can be cultivated and deepened.

Confucius (Master K'ung) would say we have a *small-minded person-in-us* and a noble or *large-minded person-in-us*—both possibilities existing at any moment. He would encourage us to remember our nobility and to live in large mind. He would remind us that this takes daily practice.

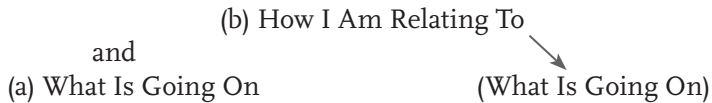
What is “practice” on this model? It is *to recognize when we are in small mind and to shift to large mind*. . . . In small mind, we tend to be partial in the double sense of being biased and of seeing less than the whole. In small mind, we are asleep in our life, on automatic pilot, “going through the motions” according to cultural scripts. In small mind, we are enslaved and reactive in the sense that someone or something triggers us and we react immediately—with no space and no time between the incoming stimulus and the automatic response.

In large mind, we see more of the whole and live in a larger world. In large mind, we are more mindful, more wakeful, opening the senses and opening the heart. In large mind, we are freer, acting from a place beneath surface disturbance. In large mind, we are *response-able*—able to choose our response in a way that benefits the whole.

RECOGNIZING TWO LEVELS

Practice begins with recognizing when we are in small mind. To do this, we must distinguish two levels—a WHAT and a HOW. Call this the fundamental distinction for all inner work: the distinction between (a) *what is going on* and (b) *how I am relating to what is going on*.

From *Living Large: Transformative Work at the Intersection of Ethics and Spirituality* (Tai Sophia Press, 2004), pp. 29–33 and 43–48. © 2004 by John Greenfelder Sullivan.



Always there are two levels. Yet often we merge the two. “How we are relating” disappears from our awareness, as if how we are relating is the only possible way we could relate.

Victor Frankl was an Austrian psychiatrist and a Jew. During the time of the Holocaust, the Nazis sent him to the camps. While he was a prisoner under unimaginable conditions, Frankl discovered this fundamental distinction. His way of phrasing it was to distinguish “liberty” (on the first level) and “freedom” (on the second level). In the camps, Frankl had no liberty—he could not go and come as he wished. Yet Frankl discovered that he did have a bit of freedom—the freedom to choose how he would relate to his situation. This he came to call “the last human freedom.” It was something his Nazi captors could not take from him.

Consider liberty and freedom in our own lives. We may or may not have the power to change what is occurring. Hurricanes and floods, sicknesses and accidents may restrict our liberty. Yet we still have an important freedom—the capacity to recognize, and possibly alter, how we relate to what is occurring in our life.

Leadership consultant Stephen Covey uses the Frankl example to emphasize the first of his seven habits of highly successful people. “Be proactive,” Covey says. “Develop the capacity to choose your response.”

Covey speaks not of small and large mind but of reactivity and proactivity. The stimulus happens—someone makes a cutting remark. The response follows immediately—an angry retort. *Reactivity*. No freedom, no ability to choose your response. *Proactivity*, on the contrary, is another name for “response-ability.” Proactivity is the ability to choose one’s response. Being proactive is often confused with being nice. This misses the key distinction. At times, hard truths must be faced. Proactivity, in this instance, is the ability to choose what you will say, and when, and how. It may or may not be “nice.”

Several years ago, my wife, Gregg, discovered she had breast cancer. At that moment, she had no choice about having cancer. Cancer was already present. But she did have a second level choice: how to relate to the cancer. First, she could choose her treatment. Second, during and after treatment, she could choose how she would live with this illness. She chose not to let cancer be her identity (not to be “Miss Cancer of the Year,” she would say). And she chose not to die before she died. By cultivating *awareness*, she

realized that she was at least *free to choose* **how** she would understand and respond to this event in her life. . . .

We humans are “meaning-creating, value-generating” beings. The odd thing is that generally we forget that *we* are labeling situations. We forget that *we* are generating the emotions we feel. It’s as if we are wearing glasses and forgetting we are wearing them. We “see through” our stories and emotions. We do not see that the stories and emotions are produced by us.

Without awareness, I take my interpretation as the truth of the matter. I defend it as such. I am unaware that I have any choice about the story I am telling. I think: “That is just the way it is!”

Without awareness, I fail to see that, in the wake of the story, I am the one putting an emotional charge on the situation. It is as if situations arrived already wrapped in language and already charged with strong emotion. I simply think: “That’s the way it is.” Aren’t I justified to be angry about it?

When the stakes are high or emotions are high, reactivity increases. Yet, even in these situations, with awareness, I can notice the key distinction: what is happening is one thing; how I interpret and respond is another. Victor Frankl could distinguish liberty and freedom even under horrendous conditions. My wife could distinguish between having cancer (no liberty here) and how she would relate to having cancer (some freedom here). To notice this fundamental distinction does not come easily. We need practice.

TEACHING STORY: FIGHT OR KEY?

When my daughter Heather was very little, she thought that I existed solely to play with her. In order to get my work done, I decide one Sunday afternoon to go over to my office in Carlton Building on the Elon campus. When I arrive, I find that the locks have been changed and I cannot get to my office. Immediately the soap opera of my mind scoops up the whole situation and I launch into high drama. “That’s just the way **THEY** are (**THEY** being the nasty, unfeeling administration and **WE** being the hard-working, noble faculty). Just the way they are—never thinking of faculty, acting without any consultation, so insensitive as to not even bother telling us!”

I start to fume and get into a state. I try to call campus security, with no results. Anger mounts. Finally, I spy the Vice President for Academic Affairs coming out of a campus luncheon. I jump him like a hungry lion. He produces a key and I get into the building.

Yet the soap opera of oppression continues to pop up when I’m working, when I’m driving home, when I’m lying in bed. And of

course, I tell the tale on Monday. This, I am now ashamed to say, continues for several days.

Finally, after days pass, I become conscious of a small voice that cuts through the tattered tale of imagined abuse. The voice says: "*John, do you want a fight or do you want a key?*"

Now part of me wants a fight. After all I am Irish. I share the heritage of the Irish man who saw a fight and inquired: "Is this a private fight or can anyone join in?" Yet the better part of me answers: "Well—[*long pause*—I guess I really want a key." I dial Physical Plant and ask: "May I have a key to Carlton Building?" "Sure," comes the reply, "it'll be ready in an hour." . . .

My emotions would have been very different that Sunday, if the meaning I attached to my frustration had been different. Suppose, for instance, I had thought, "Oh, they've changed the locks. The locksmiths must have worked overtime to do it when the fewest people would be around to be inconvenienced—too bad I'm one of the few!" From that understanding, my response might have been a hearty laugh—and then I could have sought a key in a completely different spirit. Or I could have worked under a tree. Or I could have taken the whole event as a sign from the gods to go home and take a nap, or take my family for a picnic. Any such response flowing from a larger understanding would have caused a good deal less suffering, both for me and for other people. My ranting was far from harmless!

That's not what I did, though. In the grip of my small-minded self, my understanding was small, my language followed. On the basis of my quick judgment, my response was anger, resentment, and condemnation. And I locked onto those feelings, I froze my interpretation and valuation together by saying, in effect, "That's just the way it is!"

"That's just the way it is!" or "That's just the way I am" is a hallmark of a small mind. Labels, emotions, stereotypes—these are part of the dynamic. Also, in small, ego-centered mind, I move very quickly to EITHER-OR (dualistic understanding and response—us vs. them; right vs. wrong, win vs. lose). In such a mindspace, true partnership cannot even be thought or spoken, let alone achieved. Alternatively, Confucius, by pointing out the large-minded-person-in-us, was laying the groundwork for partnership, for community.

. . . Being asleep in our lives can cause great unnecessary suffering. Great pain. Waking up can bring the capacity for compassion, forgiveness, and renewed hope.

COMPLICATIONS

Unlike law- or rule-centered ethics, the Ethics of Virtue does not claim to apply universally and to anyone in any role. Because there are multiple relevant virtues, often quite particular to certain people and situations, it is harder to generalize. In place of applying basic moral rules, the Ethics of Virtue more strongly emphasizes wisdom and good judgment.

Some contemporary thinkers object to the Ethics of Virtue for just this reason: they claim that it does not give us clear enough guidance on how to decide what to do in morally puzzling situations. Defenders of Virtue Ethics respond, however, that Ethics of Virtue offers concrete guidance in its own way, such as “Do what is honest (or: charitable . . .); do not do what is dishonest (or: uncharitable . . .).” Especially virtuous people can also be taken as models—the imperative is something like “Do as they would do.” British philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe (1919–2001), who is credited with reviving the Virtue Ethics tradition in modern moral philosophy, actually went a step farther and reversed the objection to argue against the kinds of moral rules or decision-procedures we explored in chapters 5 and 6, like utilitarianism and the Kantian Categorical Imperative. Here there is too *much* emphasis, Anscombe argued, on obligation and duty, and moral rules that claim to be applicable to any moral situation whatsoever. The result is a rigid moral code, when we need something more supple and adaptable, as well as training in good judgment.

In the view of this book, there is a place for both. Just as there are many different types of interpersonal situations, so we need many different kinds of moral guidance. Virtue ethics arguably applies better than rule-based, universalistic ethics in non-universalistic situations like families, partnerships, friendships, and communities, whereas for administrative and policy decisions, utilitarianism or a rights framework may often be more appropriate—while there are also distinctive virtues for policy-makers and political leaders as well. It is possible to make a real difference for the good and yet lack (many of?) those virtues, and likewise it is possible to be a virtuous person and *not* make a larger difference for the good. No surprise: ethics is just complicated and many-sided.

JUDGING VIRTUES?

Other concerns with the Ethics of Virtue stick harder. A difficulty already noted is that the well-known lists of virtues are culturally relative and often deeply problematic. All manner of outdated customs and prejudices stand in the background. On sexual and gender matters, for a prime example, the conventional Western virtue framework seems to be rife with double standards and dubious valuations. For example, the term “virtue” itself comes from the Latin *vir*, meaning “man” (male) and suggesting, originally, the supposedly

manly warlike virtues like courage and martial valor. By the Middle Ages it most often referred to a woman's chastity: that is, sexual self-restraint. We might argue now that both of these are deeply flawed and oppressive values. Centuries of the tightest social pressures and even physical constraints were imposed upon women in the name of that particular supposed virtue—we are by no means free of it yet.

By contrast, other arguably necessary virtues, such as a devotion to rectifying racial and ethnic prejudice and a deep sense of environmental responsibility, make no appearance in the traditional virtue frameworks. Certain kinds of prejudice and ecological insensitivity have, if anything, traditionally been considered virtues, not vices at all. But surely this kind of exclusion and relativity is problematic, and any ethic that simply embraces what any age has called "virtue" must be taken skeptically just for that reason.

What one age considers virtue may be vice in the next. The Greeks of the Golden Age, for example, found themselves in the middle of a shift from the old Homeric warrior virtues to the new and very different virtues of the democratic citizen of a city-state (though even then, only some of the propertied males). That tension between two sets of virtues is part of what provoked the rise of philosophy itself, but at the time it mainly produced confusion.

Or consider the work ethic, which we began to explore in chapter 4. The work ethic was itself a new set of virtues a few hundred years ago. It completely dominated people's lives for generations. But now we are (maybe?) moving beyond it to something new. For example, no one a century ago would have used a term like "workaholic." Those character traits that we now think are a little obsessive (even edging into vice?) were then still almost universally admired (virtues). It is arguable that we are still obsessively overworked, and overwork ourselves, anyway, but—maybe partly for just this reason—the question of the work ethic is at least on the table.

An ethic of virtue cannot provide well-founded guidance, however, if the basic guidance we need is help in choosing between changing or competing virtues themselves. An ethic that at bottom simply embraces a list of conventionally-approved character traits cannot offer us any way to do so. It is too accepting at the very point where it needs to be most cautious and critical. But the standard for any such critical evaluation cannot be more virtues, but something else. This would make the Ethics of Virtue derivative, dependent on some deeper ethical values, rather than an independent family of moral values on its own.

BAD PRACTICES

On Alasdair MacIntyre's account, virtues can best be defined and evaluated by the "internal goods" of the specific practices within which they arise. Again, truth-seeking is a special virtue of journalists, confidentiality of

doctors. But this account cannot necessarily be generalized. Not all “specific practices” are themselves moral. It’s quite fine to specify virtues for journalists or doctors in term of the internal demands of their practices. Those are benign or socially positive professions. But we would not consider an effective concentration-camp guard to be a virtuous person—not in the *moral* sense—even though he or she served ably and well the “internal goods” of the concentration camp. What about a courageous soldier fighting a bad war, or an exceptionally loyal political operative working overtime to suppress voting by more vulnerable groups? Courage and loyalty are virtues, but how can we say that they are good in such a case? We need some external standard by which to judge such practices as well. So once again we are back to the fundamental problem: virtue ethics seems to rest upon fundamental moral criteria that are not themselves virtues.

Utilitarians would argue, again, that this standard can only be social utility. A character trait is a virtue, they’d say, if it makes people happier on the whole and in the long run—if it serves the greatest good of the greatest number. The Ethics of Persons might suggest Kantian standards, or rights: a trait is a virtue if it responds to others as ends in themselves and not just means.

Of course there is a degree of cultural relativity in these other families of values as well. Not every type of society is drawn to an accountancy of personal happiness or the rarified and legalistic ideal of a Kingdom of Ends. The very generality of those frameworks, though, somewhat counterbalances their cultural relativity. As we have seen, both have demonstrated some striking and persistent potential for self-criticism and prompting social change. The Ethics of Virtue, not so much. Still, character does matter in its own right—it is *part* of the story of ethics—and the long record of different societies’ attempts to express and valorize valuable character traits, even if in part conventional, is a valuable inheritance. How can we honor and incorporate that inheritance while at the same time keeping a necessary critical distance?



FOR REVIEW

1. What (kind of thing) is a virtue?
2. What is a vice?
3. Why might we need a philosophy of the virtues?
4. How does Aristotle ground the virtues?
5. How do professional codes of ethics determine what traits to put forward as virtues?

6. What is the Confucian view of virtue?
7. What is the Taoist view of virtue?
8. How does the *Tao Te Ching* invite us to live?
9. What are some ways that virtue can be taught?
10. What is “response-ability”? How can we cultivate it?
11. What is a major strength of the Ethics of Virtue?
12. What is a telling limit of the Ethics of Virtue?



FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

7.1 QUESTIONS

What virtues are especially important to you? Start by listing some important virtues of all sorts, not just moral ones. Why do you consider these virtues? Why are they important to you?

Then move to moral virtues. Same questions: What are the two or three moral virtues most important to you? Why do you consider these moral virtues? Why are they important to you?

Are there virtues (either moral or non-moral) that you especially or notably value in others, perhaps more than in yourself? If so, what virtues? Why might you value them more in others than in yourself?

In general, how compelling do you find the Ethics of Virtue's attention to developing moral character? Are you more drawn to this than to the Ethics of the Person's and the Ethics of Happiness's criteria for right action? Why or why not?

Finally, if you had to propose a new moral virtue or two, what would they be? Out of what (hopefully) moral practices would they arise? Why have they not already been promoted as virtues?

7.2 APPLYING THE ETHICS OF VIRTUE

For the third time, here is a set of ethical questions and issues to work through from the perspective of the family of values we have been studying, this time the Ethics of Virtue. Again, pick two or three that especially interest you, or consider them all if you can. Ask in each case how the Ethics of Virtue might answer the questions or orient us toward the issue. Remember that the aim of this exercise is to *explore*, not necessarily to arrive at some final, definitive, fully confident answer. How do your answers to these questions compare to your answers to the same questions in chapters 5 and 6?

1. ETHICS AT SCHOOL

Surely the Ethics of Virtue has something to say about how you conduct yourself as a student. What are the virtues of a good student (both in the moral and the purely academic sense of “good”)? What are the “internal goods” of the practice of learning and education that ground these virtues?

Is there a Code of Ethics for students at your school? If not, consider writing one. Would it not be primarily a list of virtues (though not necessarily all moral)? Such as . . . ? How will you articulate a basis for these virtues? For instance, how might you try to justify including (or excluding) any specific virtue, if challenged? (Consult the introduction to **Going Farther** #9 for more prompts and details on writing such a Code.)

What about teachers, professors? Does the Ethics of Virtue have anything to say about the way they conduct themselves also? What *are* the virtues of a good professor (again, both in the moral and the purely academic sense of “good”)?

When roles with different “internal goods” conflict, we may have to decide which takes priority. For example, how a professor responds to a student’s needs as a *teacher* may be very different from how he or she would or should respond as a *friend*. If the professor can only respond in one way or the other, which should it be? Note that often the question of which role takes priority lies at the very core of the ethical issue in the first place. How do you think we should decide such questions?

Does the Ethics of Virtue have anything to say about how colleges and universities themselves are set up and governed? About grading systems? About pedagogy (for example, what is the most virtuous way to teach?) and the curriculum? About the place of schooling in life generally?

Most generally, has the Ethics of Virtue anything to say about the virtue of education itself? Is it a moral virtue to learn (and to teach)? Why or why not? And does the subject of study matter? Might Western and Eastern approaches to virtue differ about questions such as these? How?

2. ETHICS AT WORK

Moral questions arise in our working lives. For example, surely the Ethics of Virtue has something to say about how you conduct yourself as a worker or as a manager of other workers. You might ask first what are the virtues of a good worker in the non-moral sense. Why do you (why does our society) consider these traits virtues? Then ask what are the virtues of a good worker in the moral sense. Why are *these* virtues? Could they conflict with the non-moral virtues? What then?

In our time the work ethic is changing, as we have already noted, and in some ways toward quite opposite values. Might some of the old work-ethic virtues better be considered vices? If so, which, and why? Specifically, how would you predict that we will look back on the work ethic in another fifty or

one hundred years? What will take its place? In your view, what *should* take its place? And what is the ethical basis of your answer?

Does the Ethics of Virtue have anything to say about how work itself is set up in our society? Some have argued that with ever more intensive management and employee-surveillance methods, we are trying to create a system in which no one actually needs to be virtuous, at least in the sense of reliable, independent, and trustworthy even when not being supervised or watched. Do you agree? If so, do you think such a system would be a good idea, or a bad one?

Most generally, has the Ethics of Virtue anything to say about the moral value of work itself? Is it a moral virtue to work? Why or why not? Is there a moral obligation to work? To work *hard*? Why or why not? Does the kind of work matter?

Finally, might Western and Eastern approaches to virtue differ about questions such as these? How?

3. DRUGS

According to the Ethics of Virtue, what exactly, if anything, is morally wrong with using mind-altering drugs, from marijuana to cocaine, Ecstasy, etc.? Why? For example, what might Aristotle say? What might Confucius think? How might they justify their answers? Do you find them compelling?

Is there any morally relevant difference between these drugs, from the perspective of the Ethics of Virtue? (Oh, and should alcohol be included in this categorization? Why, why not?)

4. DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

Does the Ethics of Virtue have anything to say about today's sharply unequal distribution of income and wealth in the United States and many similar countries? Traditionally the Work Ethic explicitly connects virtue and wealth. Do you think that this connection still holds in people's minds? Do you think it holds in reality? Either way, what should be done about it?

Alongside the work ethic, ironically, major parts of the ethical traditions of both West and East have also tended to mistrust wealth, and even consider it an impediment to true virtue. Yet the pursuit of wealth dominates mainstream society as we know it. What shall we make of this? Is there an uncomfortable wisdom in the virtue tradition that we ignore at our peril? Or is this just another sign that old ideas of virtue need to be revised in light of contemporary conditions?

5. OTHER ANIMALS

What does the Ethics of Virtue imply for familiar and increasingly pressing questions about other-than-human animals, such as today's moral challenges

to the killing and eating of other animals, their use in medical experimentation and general product testing, as well as zoos, hunting, genetic manipulation, pet-keeping, and more? Would a virtuous person treat animals in any of these ways? In some but not others? Why or why not?

What would you consider the key human virtues (and vices) in regard to other animals? Consider virtues like sympathy and cooperation; vices like (especially) cruelty and insensitivity—how might they play out specifically in various kinds of relationships to other animals?

A related question would be in what sense other animals have virtues themselves. Certainly we celebrate some moral-like virtues in some other animals, such as loyalty, persistence, patience, and sympathy. Our very language of virtue is inflected with the animal, as when we call someone dogged, eagle-eyed, or busy as a bee. (Vices too, of course: people can be catty, duck issues, be pig-gish, etc.) Do you think these attributions are accurate or fair to other animals? Why or why not? What if we can sometimes actually learn virtues from them?

6. CLIMATE CHANGE

Does the Ethics of Virtue have anything to say about anthropogenic climate change—that is, climate change caused by current and past human activities? Can it be virtuous to continue consuming and polluting at such a rate that our descendants will suffer and the Earth that we and they inhabit is trashed? If not, how do we begin to formulate the necessary alternative character traits in the framework of virtue?

NOTES

This chapter's opening list of virtues is selected from a still more extensive list at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_virtues, accessed 10/3/12. One striking feature of this list is that every single virtue listed has its own linked page. Follow up some of these links, or search around a little, and all manner of intriguing websites come up (check it out). It is not always clear who is putting up these sites or what their agendas are. Some of them seem to be designed mainly to sell certain books or services. But the very diversity and appeal of this material is telling.

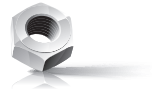
Philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe prompted much of the recent revival of virtue ethics in her article "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33 (1958): 1–19, and Rosalind Hursthouse's *On Virtue Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 1999) is a key contemporary source. See also Jennifer Welchman's collection *The Practice of Virtue: Classic and Contemporary Readings in Virtue Ethics* (Hackett Publishing Company, 2006). The opening list of vices I have borrowed from Hursthouse's entry "Virtue Ethics," in Edward N. Zalta, ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2013 edition), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2013/entries/ethics-virtue/>, accessed 12/1/16.

Josef Pieper's study of the virtues is *The Four Cardinal Virtues* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1990). On Islamic conceptions of virtue and vice, see the classic collection by the theologian and philosopher Muhammed Mahdi ibn abi Dharr al-Naraqi (1715–1795), *Jami' al-Sa'adat* (The Collector of Felicities), (Yasin Publications, 2014). William Bennett is cited from the preface to his collection *The Moral Compass* (Simon and Schuster, 1995), pp. 12–13.

Good reading on historical changes in virtues is Maria Ossowska's book *Social Determinants of Moral Ideas* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970). On the work ethic, see Juliet Schor's *The Overworked American* (Basic Books, 1993). The classic study of its history, much debated as well, is sociologist Max Weber's 1905 book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

On Aristotle's ethics, an appealing and accessible treatment is Henry Veatch, *Rational Man* (Indiana University Press, 1966). For Aquinas, see Anton Pegis, ed., *Introduction to St. Thomas Aquinas* (Modern Library, 1948). Alasdair MacIntyre is quoted from his book *After Virtue* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), pp. 178 and 204. Full texts of the Hippocratic Oath and the AMA Principles of Medical Ethics can be found online, as can the Society of Professional Journalists' code at <http://www.spj.org/ethics>. See also "Aristotle and Virtue Ethics" at the "Ethics Updates" site, <http://ethics.sandiego.edu/>.

On Confucianism and the virtues, see Philip Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self-Cultivation* (Hackett, 2000). For Taoism, start with the *Tao Te Ching* itself. Zen master Dogen is cited from Hee-jin Kim, *Eihei Dogen, Mystical Realist* (Wisdom Publications, 2004), p. 25. The story of the old man and the current shows up in many discussions of Taoism: this one I have from <http://masterymagazine.com/issue/may-2012/article/qi-dao-testimonial1>, accessed 10/3/12. The selections from the *Tao* reprinted here are from Stephen Mitchell's fine translation, online at <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/core9/phalsall/texts/taote-v3.html>. For the translation of the title *Tao Te Ching*, I draw on Alan Chan's entry "Laozi" in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, online at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/laozi/> and accessed 10/3/12.



The Ethics of Relationship

The Ethics of Happiness and of the Person are fairly modern families of values. Kant and Mill, for example, were 18th- and 19th-century thinkers, respectively. The Ethics of Virtue has its roots in the ancient world: in classical Greece and in China. Our final main family of moral values has a fair claim to being older still, indeed to being the encompassing framework within which all ethics arises—though perhaps for that very reason, the hardest to recognize.

Chapter 4 outlined the family of relationship-centered values like this:

RELATIONSHIP

The Ethics of Relationship encompasses those moral values concerned with our connections to others, from families to larger human communities. We are social beings as well as individuals: we grow up in families, take on traditions and heritages, and live within and depend upon human and also ecological communities. Recognizing how deeply our (many) communities make us who we are calls forth not only gratefulness but also a responsibility to care for and participate in them.

We can now explore the Ethics of Relationship in more detail.

CARE ETHICS

At the very beginning someone bore us into this world. Every one of us started life utterly dependent on the body of our mother. There's a song by Stan Rogers in which he sings of birth as the time "when communion is lost forever, when a heart first beats alone." It's a melancholy song. His larger point is that even though we later may become very invested

in separateness, on some deep level we still remember and yearn for that primal “communion.”

After birth we remain intimately connected to and dependent upon caregivers. Parents and others cared for each of us through all those years of babyhood and childhood. Without all of that care, none of us would be here now. Later, when we start becoming conscious of ourselves and our social relations and much of that early care for us is mostly lost to our memory, we also feel an urge to be separate. That’s the developmental project of late childhood. Our culture also stresses independence—indeed we learn to practically identify it with personhood itself—and the result is that some people never recover a sense of how deeply we are bound up with others. Still, for most people, separateness is only a phase that doesn’t last long. Friends come and go but soon some grow close and stick around. You fall in love. Teammates claim your care and concern. Co-workers do the same. Causes arise, and there are others with you in religious groups or building houses or fighting wars. You have children, maybe, yourself.

There is a dual point here. First, we are deeply, inescapably, and permanently in relationship with particular other people, and in a way that goes far beyond the relatively distant sort of relationships that seem to be the main models for the other types of moral values. Sure, we have moral and legal obligations to our children (and parents!) as well as to co-workers and fellow soldiers, and so on. But these obligations do not truly get to the core of the values at stake.

Second, relationships like these evoke deep feelings, and it is these feelings that ground deep values in turn. Sometimes it is the helpless love of a parent for a child. (A line from the writer Elizabeth Stone: “Having a child is to decide forever to have your heart go walking outside your body.”) Sometimes it is the chosen love of a life partner; sometimes love of friends or care for long-time fellow workers—but in any case, feeling is key.

You’ll remember that Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas lay out “philosophies of encounter.” People can emerge in certain extraordinary experiences as unique and precious others. Yet the suggestion here is that this is only one aspect of our relation to others. There is also an earthier way in which we come to care for and love some of those people close to us. It’s extraordinary in its own way but at the same time totally ordinary too. Care grows for those who care for us and for those with whom we work and act together. Everyday love is crucial to ethics too.

AN ETHICS THAT HONORS FEELINGS

As we have seen, the formal tradition in ethics does not speak much of love, or indeed of feeling in general. Kant even argued that feelings distort ethics. We need to act morally toward others out of a sense of duty and obligation, he argued, and not on the basis of feelings. After all, feelings can vary between people and for ourselves from moment to moment as well, but morality

claims us “categorically,” as Kant says: all of us, all the time. We should tell the truth, comfort the sick, speak up for the downtrodden, even if we don’t especially feel care, let alone love, for them.

These are not the best arguments. For one thing, in terms of constancy, feelings often greatly outdo the intellectual convictions to which Kant appeals. Few things are as utterly unshakeable as parents’ love for their children. Feelings certainly motivate a great deal of moral action.

It might be better to conclude that care and connection need development and cultivation, just like the virtues. Indeed, they *are* virtues. Certainly the practice of sustaining relationships has “internal goods,” to recall Alasdair MacIntyre’s term. The virtues, in this view, will be those traits that sustain and deepen relationships, enable us to raise children well, keep love strong, and build comradeship and solidarity. Thus the psychologist Carol Gilligan (b. 1936) describes an “Ethics of Care,” rooted once again in a specific view of the (or *a*) world, this time “a world of relationships and psychological truths where an awareness of the connection between people gives rise to a recognition of a responsibility for one another, a perception of the need for response. Seen in this light, morality arises from a recognition of relationship.” Believing in “the restorative activity of care,” as Gilligan puts it, we come to

see the actors in [moral] dilemma[s] arrayed not as opponents in a contest of rights but as members of a network of relationships on whose continuation they all depend. Consequently [the] solution to the dilemma[s] lies in activating the network by communication, . . . strengthening rather than severing connections.

Key virtues thus include perceptiveness, imagination, and sensitivity; skill in responding and nurturing; patience and creativity; and acceptance. Morality itself emerges, in the philosopher Margaret Walker’s words, as in part “a collection of perceptive, imaginative, appreciative, and expressive skills and capacities which put us and keep us in contact with the realities of ourselves and specific others” (Reading 2).

CARE ETHICS AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Gilligan began her work with the moral development research of the psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg (1927–1987). Kohlberg had concluded that most children go through several markedly different stages of moral reasoning. They start, he thought, with obedience to authority figures such as parents or teachers. Self-interest then begins operating. At its middle stages, moral thinking becomes “conventional,” meaning that children are oriented toward social approval, and later toward the law and responding to the obligations of duty. Kohlberg’s final stages of moral thinking are initially a kind of utilitarianism, an eye for the good of society as a whole. Those few who reach the height of ethical maturity then move to an ethics of universal principles.

Gilligan noticed some striking omissions in this research. For one thing, Kohlberg's interviewers initially talked only to boys—but he generalized his results to girls as well. When they did look at girls, the girls were judged by the boys' standards and tended to score lower in moral development. But what if they were actually developing *in a different way*? When Gilligan began using the same dilemmas with girls, she got very different results. As Eve Browning Cole puts it,

Gilligan's results . . . showed a pattern of moral reasoning among the women studied which diverged from [Kohlberg's] paradigm in several distinct ways. First, women reasoning their way through a moral dilemma tended to focus on the specific personal relationships within which the principal agents find themselves situated. They pondered . . . the nature and character of these relationships, tending to derive relevant ethical considerations from specific connectedness among persons. Second, they reasoned that relationships generate responsibilities and that these responsibilities might be quite specific within the relationship. . . . [T]here was thus an emphasis on . . . the concrete details of a moral situation, as opposed to its universalizable or general features, which figure so prominently in mainstream ethical discourse.

Gilligan pointed out that this approach—working within particular relationships and attending to the feelings that constitute them—is every bit as appropriate an ethics as the more familiar “male” model. Many times, surely, it is more appropriate. To construct a seemingly empirical theory of ethics built on devaluing this “different voice” is, for one thing, sexist. It is also just plain bad science. We need a more inclusive view.

Gilligan produced her own stage theory of moral development. On Gilligan's model too, moral thinking begins with selfishness. The “conventional” middle stage, however, is the opposite of selfishness: self-sacrifice. The more mature final stages find a balance between self and other, including the growing sense that self and other are intertwined—an ethics, once again, of relationship.

READING 19

From *Caring*

NEL NODDINGS

NEL NODDINGS (b. 1929) is a teacher and philosopher of education now retired from Stanford University after a long and varied career—she is also the mother of ten children—and is the author, most influentially, of *Caring: A Feminine Approach to*

Ethics and Moral Education, along with other books. The selection presented here is from that book's introduction.

Since Carol Gilligan's groundbreaking book *In a Different Voice*, Care Ethics has become a major project of feminist philosophers and other thinkers intent on recovering ethics in a relational key. You will notice many echoes of Margaret Walker's general conception of ethics (Reading 2) here. There are also parallels between Noddings' arguments and Virtue Ethics' critique of a "geometrical" or law-driven approach to ethics that insists on universality versus particularity or uniqueness. Care ethics is sometimes categorized as a form of the Ethics of Virtue, in fact. Still, key for us in this chapter is what Noddings refers to as "taking relation as ontologically basic." "Ontology" is, technically, the study of being. The point is that relationship or connection, not separateness, is the real nature of our being.

In Noddings's conception, notice also anticipations of themes from Part III of this book, such as the importance of information-gathering and attentiveness to the complexity of moral situations, and a problem-solving orientation rather than judgmentalism that traces back in part to philosophical pragmatism as well.

Ethics, the philosophical study of morality, has concentrated for the most part on moral reasoning. Much current work, for example, focuses on the status of moral predicates and, in education, the dominant model presents a hierarchical picture of moral reasoning. This emphasis gives ethics a contemporary, mathematical appearance, but it also moves discussion beyond the sphere of actual human activity and the feeling that pervades such activity. Even though careful philosophers have recognized the difference between "pure" or logical reason and "practical" or moral reason, ethical argumentation has frequently proceeded as if it were governed by the logical necessity characteristic of geometry. It has concentrated on the establishment of principles and that which can be logically derived from them. One might say that ethics has been discussed largely in the language of the father: in principles and propositions, in terms such as justification, fairness, justice. The mother's voice has been silent. Human caring and the memory of caring and being cared for, which I shall argue form the foundation of ethical response, have not received attention except as outcomes of ethical behavior. . . .

Caring: A Feminine Approach to Ethics and Moral Education, 2nd edition, by Nel Noddings, © 2003 by the Regents of the University of California. Published by the University of California Press.

The view to be expressed here is a feminine view. This does not imply that all women will accept it or that men will reject it; indeed, there is no reason why men should not embrace it. It is feminine in the deep classical sense—rooted in receptivity, relatedness, and responsiveness. It does not imply either that logic is to be discarded or that logic is alien to women. It represents an alternative to present views, one that begins with the moral attitude or longing for goodness and not with moral reasoning. It may indeed be the case that such an approach is more typical of women than of men, but this is an empirical question I shall not attempt to answer.

Women . . . enter the practical domain of moral action through a different door, so to speak. It is not the case, certainly, that women cannot arrange principles hierarchically and derive conclusions logically. It is more likely that we see this process as peripheral to, or even alien to, many problems of moral action. Faced with a hypothetical moral dilemma, women often ask for more information. We want to know more, I think, in order to form a picture more nearly resembling real moral situations. Ideally, we need to talk to the participants, to see their eyes and facial expressions, to receive what they are feeling. Moral decisions are, after all, made in real situations; they are qualitatively different from the solution of geometry problems. Women can and do give reasons for their acts, but the reasons often point to feelings, needs, impressions, and a sense of personal ideal rather than to universal principles and their application. We shall see that, as a result of this “odd” approach, women have often been judged inferior to men in the moral domain.

. . . Taking *relation* as ontologically basic simply means that we recognize human encounter and affective response as a basic fact of human existence. As we examine what it means to care and to be cared for, we shall see that both parties contribute to the relation; my caring must be somehow completed in the other if the relation is to be described as caring.

The focus of our attention will be upon how to meet the other morally. Ethical caring, the relation in which we do meet the other morally, will be described as arising out of natural caring—that relation in which we respond as one-caring out of love or natural inclination. The relation of natural caring will be identified as the human condition that we, consciously or unconsciously, perceive as “good.” It is that condition toward which we long and strive, and it is our longing for caring—to be in that special relation—that provides the motivation for us to be moral. We want to be *moral* in order to remain in the caring relation and to enhance the ideal of ourselves as one-caring.

It is this ethical ideal, this realistic picture of ourselves as one-caring, that guides us as we strive to meet the other morally. Everything depends upon the nature and strength of this ideal, for we shall not have absolute principles to guide us. Indeed, I shall reject ethics of principle as ambiguous and unstable. Wherever there is a principle, there is implied its exception and, too often, principles function to separate us from each other. We may become dangerously self-righteous when we perceive ourselves as holding a precious principle not held by the other. The other may then be devalued and treated “differently.” Our ethic of caring will not permit this to happen. We recognize that in fear, anger, or hatred we will treat the other differently, but this treatment is never conducted ethically. Hence, when we must use violence or strategies on the other, we are already diminished ethically. Our efforts must, then, be directed to the maintenance of conditions that will permit caring to flourish.

Along with the rejection of principles and rules as the major guide to ethical behavior, I shall also reject the notion of universalizability. Many of those writing and thinking about ethics insist that any ethical judgment—by virtue of its *being* an ethical judgment—must be universalizable; that is, it must be the case that, if under conditions X you are required to do A, then under sufficiently similar conditions, I too am required to do A. I shall reject this emphatically. First, my attention is not on judgment and not on the particular acts we perform but on how we meet the other morally. Second, in recognition of the feminine approach to meeting the other morally—our insistence on caring for the other—I shall want to preserve the uniqueness of human encounters. Since so much depends on the subjective experience of those involved in ethical encounters, conditions are rarely “sufficiently similar” for me to declare that you must do what I must do.

... I shall claim that we are dependent on each other even in the quest for personal goodness. How good *I* can be is partly a function of how *you*—the other—receive and respond to me. Whatever virtue I exercise is completed, fulfilled, in you. The primary aim of all education must be nurturance of the ethical ideal.

To accomplish the purposes set out above, I shall strike many contrasts between masculine and feminine approaches to ethics and education and, indeed, to living. These are not intended to divide men and women into opposing camps. They are meant, rather, to show how great the chasm is that already divides the masculine and feminine in each of us and to suggest that we enter a dialogue of genuine dialectical nature in order to achieve

an ultimate transcendence of the masculine and feminine in moral matters.

An important difference between an ethic of caring and other ethics that give subjectivity its proper place is its foundation in relation. The philosopher who begins with a supremely free consciousness—an aloneness and emptiness at the heart of existence—identifies *anguish* as the basic human affect. But our view, rooted as it is in relation, identifies *joy* as a basic human affect. When I look at my child—even one of my grown children—and recognize the fundamental relation in which we are each defined, I often experience a deep and overwhelming joy. It is the recognition of and longing for relatedness that form the foundation of our ethic, and the joy that accompanies fulfillment of our caring enhances our commitment to the ethical ideal that sustains us as one-caring.

ETHICS AND COMMUNITY

A community is some linked set of others with whom we have some compelling commonality. Maybe we share interests or work; maybe we share political convictions; maybe we live in the same neighborhood or country. There are faith communities, sports communities, online communities, and all sorts of others. Each of us, in fact, belongs to many such communities. All of us belong to at least the largest and most inclusive ones.

Here, then, ethical relationship is with a *group* of others, and with the associated institutions, like churches or professions or organizations or forms of governance, all the way up to ethnic and other kinds of heritages. Some are voluntary. Take a certain job, move to a certain area, and you more or less automatically acquire a set of well-defined links to others. You may join political or religious organizations. You may also leave them. But other communities you are simply born into, and leaving is not an option: ethnic communities, for instance, or a religious heritage, even if you decide to give it up or change later, and of course the current global “community”—for as co-inhabitants of this fragile ecosphere we are also and inescapably linked with every other human on the planet.

Such communities literally make us who we are. The African Studies professor Janie Ward writes of African Americans:

Throughout our history, from plantation proverbs to freedom songs, we have grappled with questions about who we are as an African people and where we are headed. The moral lessons we’ve learned and passed on

have had to be culturally specific, responsive to the effects of injustice that have circumscribed our lives, and respectful of the care, connectedness, and interdependence that assured our survival through the best and the worst of times.

Such relationships are “culturally specific,” she says—distinct from (though surely overlapping with) the legacies of other peoples—but still, crucial to the identities of individual African Americans.

In fact, identity is *always* communal in essential ways. We cannot even imagine being without a specific history, without family or a civic community in a broader sense, or even without a place. For most of human history, people lived in groups and communities so small that everyone’s name and personal history were known to almost everyone they might encounter. In modern times, most of us typically have much more anonymous encounters, but we still share communal identities such as ethnicity or politics, or even allegiances to certain soccer or hockey teams.

Even speaking a particular language is a form of community. A language is an automatic link with any other speaker of the same tongue. Half-way around the world, maybe, think of running into someone who speaks your language, when maybe you haven’t heard it out of anyone else’s mouth for months. A language is also a rather amazing link with everyone in the past—literally millions and millions of people—who made that tongue what it is today so that it could be passed on to us as such a supple and live cultural legacy. This kind of community is so basic as to often be invisible, but it is no less essential for all that.

IMPLICATIONS

Gratefulness follows, for starters. What precious and immense legacies we all inherit! Countless people over long stretches of time have helped make me what I am—what a gift.

Second, right away, in consequence, a commitment also follows to do our part to respect and sustain our communities and their core values. Ward, for example, speaks immediately and emphatically of the need to be “respectful of the care, connectedness, and interdependence that assured our survival through the best and the worst of times.”

It’s not that community values necessarily trump all others. Here, as in many places, some kind of balance is required. To take the example of African-American community ethics once again, listen to the words of professors Vanessa Siddle Walker and John R. Snarey in their book *Racing Moral Formation*:

[T]hose who follow African American ethics refuse to starkly dichotomize self and community. To care for the self is to care for the group, and

to care for the group is to care for the self. . . . [This is a] moral legacy of the West African heritage of most African Americans. The successful realization of a balanced community-and-individual ethic produces the fruit of *uplift*—the enhancement of the community and the valuing of the individual's diverse gifts. . . . [T]he weakness that would result from a large imbalance is either *one-sided selfishness*, acting according to one's needs and interests without any balanced regard for the larger community; or *one-sided self-sacrifice*, the obliteration or denial of one's own interests, needs, or selfhood for the sake of "more worthy" community or cause.

Notice also the parallels to Gilligan's model of moral development here: again, on another level now, the struggle of moral maturation is to find a balanced way between and beyond both self-seeking and self-sacrifice. It also sounds rather like Aristotle's doctrine of the Mean!

Finally, beyond both gratefulness and respect, it is our challenge to *contribute* in turn to the communities that form and sustain us. Ethnic or religious heritages are ours to carry on. The work of a profession; sustaining, adjusting, or improving a form of government or a style of art; rebuilding a landscape or a place: all of these may call to us, and among them, somewhere, we will find our life's tasks.

Once again, it's not that the current or the most visible or insistent community values necessarily rule. One kind of contribution can even be loving resistance. If there are wrongs, it is our responsibility to right the wrongs. Still, this is *our* tradition, our country, our community. We are responsible for it even if we would rather sometimes walk away.

THE COMMUNAL ROOTS OF ETHICS FOR THE AKAN PEOPLE

A communal understanding of the roots of ethics is ancient. One sign of this is that this understanding is common to indigenous peoples around the world. We can look briefly at two examples.

Kwasi Wiredu is a widely-read Ghanaian philosopher (b. 1931) who also teaches in the United States. In an essay called "The Moral Foundations of an African Culture," he paints a rich picture of an ethical life deeply constituted by family and communal relations in his own people, the Akan of West Africa. "Akan society," Wiredu writes, "is of a type in which the greatest value is attached to communal belonging." Between kin and larger community, as he puts it,

a human person is essentially the centre of a thick set of concentric circles of obligations and responsibilities matched by rights and privileges revolving around levels of relationships irradiating from the consanguinity

of household kith and kin, through the “blood” ties of lineage and clan, to the wider circumference of human familyhood . . .

Our rootedness in relationship, in short, is anchored by layer upon layer of connections. Personal relations, as expressed by the Ethics of Care, are the closest of these “concentric circles,” but there are many more besides.

This kind of interrelatedness, again, carries with it an ethic. Since none of us stands alone, all of us must stand with each other.

. . . [T]he Akan philosophy of life . . . is made explicit in the maxim, *Onipa hia moa*, meaning, by way of first approximation, “A human being needs help.” The intent of the maxim, however, is not just to observe a fact, but also to prescribe a line of conduct. The imperative here is carried by the word *hia*, which in this context also has a connotation of entitlement: a human being deserves, ought, to be helped.

Like the ethics of care, then, the ethics of community emphasizes and also embraces dependency. Our interdependence is a good thing, not a weakness but a strength—it anchors our very being human. Wiredu declares that the idea of dependency is a component of the very Akan conception of a person. In any case it is a given, a necessity. This is what we are.

What follows, then, is the necessity of mutual aid. From chapter 4’s introduction of the Ethics of Relationship you may remember the story of Amish farmer David Kline answering a visitor’s question about what he would do if his barn burned down. Why didn’t he carry insurance? Kline replied by pointing to the neighboring farms with his hand and saying “they’re my insurance.” All the other farm families would come and barn-raise—as of course he and his family would come were some other farm in need.

Wiredu tells a very similar story, rooted in the very same dependency and imperative for mutual aid. Akan farming, he says, was generally based on small holdings worked by individual farmers and their households. Predictably on any such farm there will be times when help is needed: at harvests, for one, or for land-clearing.

At such moments, all that was necessary was for one to send word to one’s neighbors indicating the time, place, and the nature of the help needed. Very much as day follows night, the people would assemble at the right time at the indicated place with their own implements of work and together help get the job done speedily and with almost festive enthusiasm, in full and warranted conviction that when their turn came the same gesture would be returned in exactly the same spirit. Anybody who availed himself of the benefits of this system and yet dragged his feet when the call came from others was liable to be convicted, at the

bar of public opinion, of such fathomless degeneracy as to be branded a social outcast.

Note that phrase: fathomless degeneracy. For a strong Ethic of Relationship such as the Akan's, failing to reciprocate help when needed isn't just impolite or a little inappropriate, like maybe stiffing a waiter. It is literally unimaginable, "fathomless." How could anyone not see that we're all in this together?

Wiredu shows us an explicitly communal ethics from the inside, then, and also offers a glimpse of the deep historical and cultural roots of African-American ethical practice in turn. Life itself is mutual aid for the Akan, according to Wiredu. To stand outside this revolving constellation of obligations and expectations is to stand outside of life itself.

THE COMMUNAL ROOTS OF ETHICS FOR THE TEWA PUEBLO

Early in this book, you'll recall, we spoke of the Great Law of the Iroquois, which asks us to consider not just what we have, and those around us, but also our descendants out to the seventh generation. We also read the seven-generations idea as locating us not at the beginning but in the middle of seven generations. "Remember who you are!" the Iroquois say: part of a greater flow of forebears and heirs.

For more on the ethical implications of this vision of relationship, we can turn to Gregory Cajete (b. 1952), a Tewa author and professor from Santa Clara Pueblo, New Mexico, and specifically his book *Look to the Mountain*. His theme, once again, is "We are all related," or *Mitakuye Oyasin* in the Tewa tongue. This, Cajete declares, "personifies the integrative expression of what Indian people perceive as Community."

Relationship is the cornerstone of Tribal community; the nature and expression of community are the foundation of Tribal identity. It is through community that Indian people come to understand the nature of their personhood and their connection to the communal soul of their people. The community is the place where the forming of the heart and face of the individual as one of the people is most fully expressed. Community is the context in which the Indian person comes to know the nature of relationship, responsibility, and participation in the life of one's people.

Cajete's conclusion, almost exactly paralleling Wiredu's, is that

Nothing exists in isolation. [Native people's] individualism does not presuppose autonomy, alienation, or isolation. And freedom is not the right to express yourself but the far more fundamental right to be yourself.

Not in separateness but together, in community, “is the place where each person can, metaphorically speaking, become complete and express the fullness of their life.”

Cajete emphasizes the multiple ways in which Tewa Pueblo methods of child-rearing and education teach interrelatedness and interdependence every day. The stories of the elders, for example—their special province—tell the young ones about respect just as their grandparents told the elders when they were children. “So it goes, giving and receiving, giving and receiving stories helping children to remember that the story of their community is really the story of themselves!”

Morals and ethics were modeled by the family and community. Respect for the elderly, honesty, care for the ill, appreciation of differences, respect for privacy, proper behavior during ceremonies, and proper treatment and respect for plants and animals were practiced daily in direct and tangible ways. In Indigenous community everyone knew their relationship to their people, Nature, and the things of their society.

Listen, for example, as Cajete writes of his own early childhood trips to neighboring pueblos with his grandmother.

I remember helping the old people prepare, plant, and hoe their gardens. I remember sitting with those old ones during the hot lazy afternoons eating Indian cookies and listening to all their stories. I remember spending days in the foothills and mountains near the Pueblo gathering plants that my grandmother and other old ones directed me to. . .

I remember my grandmother telling me that all older people were my aunts and uncles and their children were my cousins and that I should call them such and treat them kindly. I remember that every one, young and old, shared with one another. When we went to visit older people we would take gifts, usually food, cloth, or meat. We would return with fruit, vegetables, and other gifts. It was a form of reciprocal giving; that was how things got spread around.

There were unhappy memories too, of course—but never experiences of outright rejection or of not belonging. Again, as with the Akan, the sense of the personal is subsumed into the community. “Tribal man is hardly a personal ‘self’ in our modern sense of the word. He does not so much live in a tribe; the tribe lives in him.”

The elders tell us, “Celebrate your life, be happy with what you have, care for one another, be of good thoughts and words, help each other, share with one another the life you have been given. This is the way our People continue to live through you and in you, be glad you are one of the People!”

THE EXPANDING CIRCLE

Until now this chapter has spoken of “community” in a wholly human sense, and we’ve been acting like this is the most natural thing in the world. But in fact it is not natural at all. We are also inescapably linked with the Earth: with other living creatures and with the all-encompassing ecosphere. Recall our definition of community at the beginning of the last section: a community is some linked set of others with whom we have a compelling commonality. Many philosophers and others now hold that any ethics of relationship must recognize the *Earth* community as well.

The Lakota people have a phrase used to open and close many ceremonies. It has been translated into English as “All My Relations,” and its point is to highlight the interrelatedness of all life on Earth—not only in the sense of global interdependency, but also in the specific sense that each species is a relative, a member of our family, quite genuinely and literally a *relation*. We’re in *community* with them (too).

Animals, for instance. Animals surround us, work with us, sing in the trees all around us and swim in the same seas, romp through our dreams and stories and myths, and often enough through our houses and daily lives too. The ecologist Paul Shepard even wrote a book subtitled *How Animals Made Us Human*. Just as with our other relations, life in the community of other beings shapes our own identities as well.

And of course we are animals too! The whole point is that we have many of the same feelings, experiences, and needs as other creatures. Utilitarians argue that therefore animal suffering counts morally just as the same suffering in us would count; but here suffering is not the whole story, either. Just like suffering in any other of our relations, it is morally bad partly because these are our *kin*.

It’s not just animals that “make us human.” Truly, it’s nature as a whole. This is, after all, the world in which humans evolved. Its climates shaped our skins, its terrains shaped our bodies, its sounds and sights and textures shaped our senses, its mysteries shaped our minds. And all of this shaping continues. The magician-philosopher David Abram (b. 1957) writes beautifully of the Pacific Northwest:

Oak, madrone, Douglas fir, red-tailed hawk, serpentine in the sandstone, a certain scale to the topography, drenching rains in the winter, fog off-shore in the summer, salmon surging in the streams—all of these together make up a particular state of mind, a place-specific intelligence shared by all the humans that dwell therein, but also by the coyotes yapping in those valleys, by the bobcats and the ferns and the spiders, by all beings who live and make their way in that zone. Each place its own psyche. Each sky its own blue.

This same sense of the depth of specific places, to the point that they shape our identities themselves, arises naturally when people have lived

since time out of mind in a specific place. Like Abram, I mean *really* specific, too: this mountain range, this valley, this stream, the way the sun rises and the winds blow at *home*. All of this is part of who we are. The Buddhist activist and thinker Thich Nhat Hanh (b. 1926) evocatively speaks of this as *interbeing*. It's not just with other humans. Ultimately, inevitably, and also astonishingly, we are in interrelation with *everything*—with all that is.

IMPLICATIONS

Again, gratefulness surely follows. Respect too, as toward those human communities that also nurture us. A commitment to attend to the world's needs and to respond. As the Swiss doctor and humanitarian Albert Schweitzer wrote,

The great fault of all ethics hitherto has been that they believed themselves to have to deal only with the relations of man to man. In reality, however, the question is what is his attitude to the world and all life that comes within his reach. A man is ethical only when life, as such, is sacred to him, and when he devotes himself helpfully to all life that is in need of help.

Schweitzer acknowledges human ethics too—as a special case of the larger *life* ethic. “The ethic of the relation of man to man is not something apart by itself; it is only a particular relation which results from the universal one.”

These are huge questions. Philosophers have been asking them seriously for several decades now, and only the barest outlines of answers are emerging. Some, like Schweitzer, want to extend ethics to all of life—not only to ourselves and all other animals, but also to trees and plants. Usually the argument is that all living things, even if not “aware,” at least strive toward something, have a “good of their own,” which can also be taken as a good by others.

This is still a new and challenging idea. Much of the Western tradition in ethics teaches that it is what makes us distinctive as humans that makes us special, and we have learned to identify our distinctiveness with a certain kind of consciousness. Yet even in this book so far we have also seen that there are counter-ideas even within our tradition: philosophers of “encounter,” for example, like Martin Buber, who suggest that encounter goes well beyond the species boundary, and utilitarian philosophers who argue that suffering in any creature is morally bad and ought to be minimized. Meanwhile, again, indigenous peoples everywhere are ethically invested not in distinctiveness but in *belonging*.

Many do not even divide living from nonliving forms as insistently as we do. The Lakota, for example, consider everything “living” to some extent. In any case, it may well be that rivers and mountains must also have a direct voice in our ethics: they too are “relations.” Families of animals or plants—species—may also count in their own right.

For that matter, what about whole ecosystems, systems that include many different kinds of creatures and elements? Ecology is supposed to be a holistic

science—surely moral value should attach to whole natural systems too, and not just to certain of their parts.

The ethical circle, in short, is expanding. Our survey of the Ethics of Relationship comes to rest, perhaps, with a maximally expansive understanding of relationship. And why not? “All Our Relations”!

READING 20

From “*The Land Ethic*”

ALDO LEOPOLD

ALDO LEOPOLD (1887–1948)—forester, educator, philosopher, farmer—is widely considered the father of the contemporary American environmental movement. In this famous essay from the end of his book *Sand County Almanac*, he arrives at an explicit environmental ethics.

Notice how Leopold roots human communities in the character of the land they inhabit. All relationships intertwine and are grounded in the largest ecological wholes. Make special note also, near the end, of Leopold’s famous criterion for right action: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.”

When god-like Odysseus returned from the wars in Troy, he hanged all on one rope a dozen slave-girls of his household whom he suspected of misbehavior during his absence. This hanging involved no question of propriety. The girls were property. The disposal of property was then, as now, a matter of expediency, not of right and wrong.

Concepts of right and wrong were not lacking from Odysseus’ Greece: witness the fidelity of his wife through the long years before at last his black-prowed galleys clove the wine-dark seas for home. The ethical structure of that day covered wives, but had not yet been extended to human chattels. During the three thousand years which have since elapsed, ethical criteria have been extended to many fields of conduct, with corresponding shrinkages in those judged by expediency only.

A SAND COUNTY ALMANAC by Leopold (1989) 1800w from “The Land Ethic.” © 1949, 1977 by Oxford University Press, Inc. By permission of Oxford University Press USA.

THE ETHICAL SEQUENCE

This extension of ethics, so far studied only by philosophers, is actually a process in ecological evolution. Its sequences may be described in ecological as well as in philosophical terms. An ethic, ecologically, is a limitation on freedom of action in the struggle for existence. An ethic, philosophically, is a differentiation of social from anti-social conduct. These are two definitions of one thing. The thing has its origin in the tendency of interdependent individuals or groups to evolve modes of co-operation. The ecologist calls these symbioses. Politics and economics are advanced symbioses in which the original free-for-all competition has been replaced, in part, by co-operative mechanisms with an ethical content. . . .

The first ethics dealt with the relation between individuals; the Mosaic Decalogue is an example. Later accretions dealt with the relation between the individual and society. The Golden Rule tries to integrate the individual to society; democracy to integrate social organization to the individual.

There is as yet no ethic dealing with man's relation to land and to the animals and plants which grow upon it. Land, like Odysseus' slave-girls, is still property. The land-relation is still strictly economic, entailing privileges but not obligations.

The extension of ethics to this third element in human environment is, if I read the evidence correctly, an evolutionary possibility and an ecological necessity. It is the third step in a sequence. The first two have already been taken. Individual thinkers since the days of Ezekiel and Isaiah have asserted that the despoliation of land is not only inexpedient but wrong. Society, however, has not yet affirmed their belief. I regard the present conservation movement as the embryo of such an affirmation.

An ethic may be regarded as a mode of guidance for meeting ecological situations so new or intricate, or involving such deferred reactions, that the path of social expediency is not discernible to the average individual. Animal instincts are modes of guidance for the individual in meeting such situations. Ethics are possibly a kind of community instinct in-the-making.

THE COMMUNITY CONCEPT

All ethics so far evolved rest upon a single premise that the individual is a member of a community of interdependent parts. His instincts prompt him to compete for his place in that community, but his ethics prompt him also to co-operate (perhaps in order that there may be a place to compete for).

The land ethic simply enlarges the boundaries of the community to include soils, waters, plants, and animals, or collectively: the land.

This sounds simple: do we not already sing our love for and obligation to the land of the free and the home of the brave? Yes, but just what and whom do we love? Certainly not the soil, which we are sending helter-skelter down river. Certainly not the waters, which we assume have no function except to turn turbines, float barges, and carry off sewage. Certainly not the plants, of which we exterminate whole communities without batting an eye. Certainly not the animals, of which we have already extirpated many of the largest and most beautiful species. A land ethic of course cannot prevent the alteration, management, and use of these "resources," but it does affirm their right to continued existence, and, at least in spots, their continued existence in a natural state.

In short, a land ethic changes the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it. It implies respect for his fellow-members, and also respect for the community as such.

In human history, we have learned (I hope) that the conqueror role is eventually self-defeating. Why? Because it is implicit in such a role that the conqueror knows, *ex cathedra*, just what makes the community clock tick, and just what and who is valuable, and what and who is worthless, in community life. It always turns out that he knows neither, and this is why his conquests eventually defeat themselves. . . .

That man is, in fact, only a member of a biotic team is shown by an ecological interpretation of history. Many historical events, hitherto explained solely in terms of human enterprise, were actually biotic, interactions between people and land. The characteristics of the land determined the facts quite as potently as the characteristics of the men who lived on it.

Consider, for example, the settlement of the Mississippi valley. In the years following the Revolution, three groups were contending for its control: the native Indian, the French and English traders, and the American settlers. Historians wonder what would have happened if the English at Detroit had thrown a little more weight into the Indian side of those tipsy scales which decided the outcome of the colonial migration into the cane-lands of Kentucky. It is time now to ponder the fact that the cane-lands, when subjected to the particular mixture of forces represented by the cow, plow, fire, and axe of the pioneer, became bluegrass. What if the plant succession inherent in this dark and bloody ground had, under the impact of these forces, given us some worthless sedge, shrub, or weed? Would Boone and Kenton have held out? Would there have been any overflow into Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri? Any

Louisiana Purchase? Any transcontinental union of new states? Any Civil War?

Kentucky was one sentence in the drama of history. We are commonly told what the human actors in this drama tried to do, but we are seldom told that their success, or the lack of it, hung in large degree on the reaction of particular soils to the impact of the particular forces exerted by their occupancy. In the case of Kentucky, we do not even know where the bluegrass came from—whether it is a native species, or a stowaway from Europe.

Contrast the cane-lands with what hindsight tells us about the Southwest, where the pioneers were equally brave, resourceful, and persevering. The impact of occupancy here brought no bluegrass, or other plant fitted to withstand the bumps and buffetings of hard use. This region, when grazed by livestock, reverted through a series of more and more worthless grasses, shrubs, and weeds to a condition of unstable equilibrium. Each recession of plant types bred erosion; each increment to erosion bred a further recession of plants. The result today is a progressive and mutual deterioration, not only of plants and soils, but of the animal community subsisting thereon. . . .

In short, the plant succession steered the course of history; the pioneer simply demonstrated, for good or ill, what successions inhered in the land. Is history taught in this spirit? It will be, once the concept of land as a community really penetrates our intellectual life.

THE LAND PYRAMID

. . . In the beginning, the pyramid of life was low and squat; the food chains short and simple. Evolution has added layer after layer, link after link. Man is one of thousands of accretions to the height and complexity of the pyramid. Science has given us many doubts, but it has given us at least one certainty: the trend of evolution is to elaborate and diversify the biota.

Land, then, is not merely soil; it is a fountain of energy flowing through a circuit of soils, plants, and animals. Food chains are the living channels which conduct energy upward; death and decay return it to the soil. The circuit is not closed; some energy is dissipated in decay, some is added by absorption from the air, some is stored in soils, peats, and long-lived forests; but it is a sustained circuit, like a slowly augmented revolving fund of life. There is always a net loss by downhill wash, but this is normally small and offset by the decay of rocks. It is deposited in the ocean and, in the course of geological time, raised to form new lands and new pyramids.

The velocity and character of the upward flow of energy depend on the complex structure of the plant and animal community, much as the upward flow of sap in a tree depends on its complex cellular organization. Without this complexity, normal circulation would presumably not occur. Structure means the characteristic numbers, as well as the characteristic kinds and functions, of the component species. This interdependence between the complex structure of the land and its smooth functioning as an energy unit is one of its basic attributes.

When a change occurs in one part of the circuit, many other parts must adjust themselves to it. Change does not necessarily obstruct or divert the flow of energy; evolution is a long series of self-induced changes, the net result of which has been to elaborate the flow mechanism and to lengthen the circuit. Evolutionary changes, however, are usually slow and local. Man's invention of tools has enabled him to make changes of unprecedented violence, rapidity, and scope. . . .

THE OUTLOOK

It is inconceivable to me that an ethical relation to land can exist without love, respect, and admiration for land, and a high regard for its value. By value, of course, I mean something far broader than mere economic value; I mean value in the philosophical sense. . . .

The "key-log" which must be moved to release the evolutionary process for an ethic is simply this: quit thinking about decent land-use as solely an economic problem. Examine each question in terms of what is ethically and esthetically right, as well as what is economically expedient. A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.

It of course goes without saying that economic feasibility limits the tether of what can or cannot be done for land. It always has and it always will. The fallacy the economic determinists have tied around our collective neck, and which we now need to cast off, is the belief that economics determines all land use. This is simply not true. An innumerable host of actions and attitudes, comprising perhaps the bulk of all land relations, is determined by the land-users' tastes and predilections, rather than by his purse. The bulk of all land relations hinges on investments of time, forethought, skill, and faith rather than on investments of cash. As a land-user thinketh, so is he.

COMPLICATIONS

Ethical philosophers used to formal ethical systems like utilitarianism and Kantian ethics sometimes resist acknowledging the Ethics of Relationship as an ethics at all. This is due in part to its emphasis on feeling, especially in Care Ethics, and its emphasis on particularity rather than universality. Environmental ethics' insistence on moral values beyond the human sphere is not fully established either, even today. Some philosophers, like much of today's culture, insist that ethics is by definition a human affair and that moral values in nature must ultimately reduce to human need and legitimate expectations. You may have noticed that even Margaret Walker's much broader picture of the scope of ethics (Reading 2) still seems to be restricted to the human sphere.

Yet it should be clear from what has been said so far in this chapter that the values of relationship are deep and basic values. We are enjoined to take care for other sorts of basic needs and legitimate expectations also—our definition of ethics, remember—literally since time out of mind, certainly long before the demand ever arose for the more legalistic rules now featured in more formal ethics.

We could even argue about which ethic is really more “traditional.” Though contemporary philosophers speak of formal ethical systems as “traditional,” in contrast to what seem like newer and more challenging types of moral values like Care Ethics and environmental values, one could also argue that this supposedly “traditional” formal ethics is actually the historical new-comer. Caring is far deeper and older. The *really* traditional ethic, one could argue, is the Ethics of Relationship.

You can catch a hint of this too in a report from Onandaga chief and “Faithkeeper” Oren Lyons (b. 1930), telling of a moment when the Iroquois nation took the world stage to speak for the Seventh Generation—and beyond.

We went to Geneva, the six nations, the great Lakota nation, as representatives of indigenous people of the western hemisphere, and what was the message that we gave? “There is a hue and cry for human rights,” they said, “for all people,” and the indigenous people said, “What of the rights of the natural world? Where is the seat for the Buffalo or the Eagle? Who is representing them here in this forum? Who is speaking for the waters of the Earth? Who is speaking for the trees and the forests? Who is speaking for the Fish, for the Whales, for the Beavers, for our children? . . . We are like a conscience; we are small, but we are not a minority; we are the landholders, we are the landkeepers; we are not a minority, for our brothers are all the natural world, and we are by far the majority. . . .”

In any case, again, at least in the view of this book, no family of moral values is entitled to claim to be all of morality, as if only some subset of values were all of ethics all by itself. It is also not surprising that the strengths of each are the very features that the others tend to overlook or sideline. Thus utilitarianism

and the Ethics of Persons can be critiqued from the point of view of the Ethics of Relationship just as much as vice versa. From the perspective of the Ethics of Relationship, it is the other families that have somehow missed the point. The invocation of “All Our Relations” may be like a sudden voice from a vastly larger world, reminding us the real depth of human values. But it still does not follow from this that the other families must now be pushed to the side in turn. Each has its place. The aim of ethical reflection, as understood in this book at least, is not to decide between them or debate about which single perspective is the proper one, but to locate and appreciate them all.

It may be that the real worry is practical. When values multiply in so many different directions, how are we to make actual moral decisions? As we shall see in Part III, though, greater diversity of values does not necessarily make decisions harder. It definitely makes them more *interesting*, and it may actually make them easier in some ways. Besides, ethics is not necessarily primarily about making the most efficient decisions. There are other ways of making a constructive difference in problematic ethical situations, such as paying attention to the diversity of values that arise—our first aim here.

In any case, if the set of moral values somehow really does have to be kept whittled down in order to make practical decisions possible, why would it be the values of relationship, of all things, that get whittled away? On the contrary, why shouldn't they be the longest retained?

THE NEED FOR CRITICAL STANDPOINTS

At the same time, as we also should expect, the Ethics of Relationship has limits and challenges, just like the other three families of moral values.

The Ethics of Persons reminds us that there is a preciousness in each individual. Each of us is unique, arguably has individual rights, not just to be submerged into a mass and treated as a mere means to the goods of larger collectivities. Speaking in the broadest historical terms, the recognition of individuals in this sense is one of the great moral achievements of modernity. Individualism in turn is the root of the virtues—indeed ideals—of self-reliance, independence, and free thinking. It is counterweight to the ever-present danger of undue interference and coercion in our lives by religions, states (governments), corporations, and other institutional or communal groups or organizations.

For the demands of larger social groups such as family and ethnic or national communities can also sometimes be oppressive. A family or a community may well think that subservience to specific and very singular norms is the only right way, the only way to Heaven, the way to honor the ancestors or God, or the like. There is a long and difficult history of women escaping (or trying to escape) highly restrictive gender roles, gay people seeing freedom to love who and how they please, freethinkers fleeing doctrinaire religious or political communities, and, alas, much more. Relationship cannot simply define an ethic without any recourse.

In short, there are times when we desperately need to be able to step out as individuals, to sever ties and refuse demands, to stand alone if need be. And at those times we have every right to expect ethics to back us up. Individualism and interbeing need to be in some sort of *balance*. We need ethical understandings that affirm them both.

Nel Noddings calls Care Ethics a “feminine” approach and the “ethics of the mother,” though she is careful to say that care is available to men and fathers as well. (She’s even willing to speak of appropriately caring men as “mothers,” though it’s hard for me to decide whether this truly transcends gender or does just the opposite.) Still, even this can stereotype women in ways that also can become oppressive to those who don’t fit the mold. In the critical literature, this is called “essentializing.” It may fit some women but not others, and it may even be a kind of straitjacket into which some women feel forced, while men might seem to be unjustly excluded. To the extent that women are more associated with the care approach—and the empirical evidence is complex and unclear on this—it may be more due to social training and stereotype than, somehow, to “nature.”

Consider the all-too-common stories of women who stay with abusive spouses long after there is any hope of reform for him or even safety for her. Such loyalty, sometimes literally to the death, is certainly one way to honor relationships. It is, sometimes at least, a genuine testament to the power of relational care, though there are certainly also other and more coercive reasons why a woman might make this choice. Most of us, though, would probably say that this is going much too far. Certainly that it is not something that ethics could *require*. At the very least there needs to be critical space to stand aside or step away. More than that, though: shouldn’t ethics, sometimes at least, actually require the opposite: breaking the relationship?

If so, it is not clear how the reasons could be found in an ethic of care. Perhaps they could arise from the imperative for a woman (for anyone) also to care for herself—or do they necessarily, or anyway more powerfully and appropriately, arise from one (or more) of the other families of moral values? An Ethic of the Person, for example, might say that when women are thoroughly conditioned for loyalty to relationship, especially when men are not, they are systematically discriminated against. Here justice may call for something quite different than an Ethics of Relationship.

There are parallel worries that a strong environmental ethic does not leave enough room for individual rights. Aldo Leopold appears to offer a sweeping ethical criterion based on ecological relationship: “A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise.” As stirring and compelling as this may seem, and essential to include, it also surely cannot be the sole criterion for right and wrong. Too many ethically unacceptable things might leave the biotic community as a whole largely unaffected, or even improved. Again, then: not even the most encompassing of points of view has the whole story by itself.

STRANGERS

Finally, the Ethics of Relationship, so firmly and compellingly grounded in families and communities, has problems dealing with those who stand outside families and communities. What about the outsider and the stranger? By definition, outsiders do not share the relationships that underlie the relations of care and connection that this chapter has been discussing. In that case, though, it seems that the Ethics of Relationship has not much to say about them.

For Philip Hallie's French villagers (Reading 8), for example, the Jewish refugees from the Nazis were strangers. The villagers did not have relationships with them. Why not abandon them to their fate, then—especially when hospitality might well endanger the existing village community? Similarly, today, what about homeless people, abandoned children, refugees from war or environmental disaster? Surely they are owed something, perhaps even precisely for that reason? But how can the Ethics of Relationship take account of this?

Maybe it can't. Maybe this is just one more point at which we have to acknowledge that the Ethics of Relationship is incomplete, and we need the other families of moral values to help out. A second possible response, though, is that real communities do, in fact, work out ways to include outsiders—to grant them some moral standing in the community, even if not equality. "Guest workers," for example, are not citizens but still have some legal rights and moral standing in many European countries today. But is such a halfway status enough?

Of course, from the standpoint of Thich Nhat Hanh's "interbeing," no one is ever a complete outsider. In the ultimate sense, there are no strangers. Not only is "no person an island"—no island is an island either, so to speak. All land is linked under the waters. Still, some relationships are closer than others. Some interconnections are more distant. How do we keep them all in their proper places?

**FOR REVIEW**

1. What is Care Ethics?
2. Contrast Kohlberg's and Gilligan's views of moral development.
3. According to Nel Noddings, what are some of the implications of an Ethics of Care?
4. What is a community?
5. What ethical difference does a community make?
6. Explain the communal roots of ethics for the Akan and Tewa peoples.

7. What is “interbeing”?
8. What is the “expanding circle”?
9. What do the Lakota people mean by “All My Relations”?
10. What is Aldo Leopold’s criterion for the ultimate standard of right and wrong?
11. What are some of the strengths of the Ethics of Relationship?
12. What are some limits and challenges of the Ethics of Relationship?



FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

8.1 QUESTIONS

Think about the communities that are most present in your own life. Family, a team or other group perhaps, maybe a religious community. Maybe something as simple as your dormitory, which for many students is the first real experience of community, at least with biologically unrelated people: the first time living so interdependently with a large number of people to whom there are responsibilities and with whom there is accountability as sharers of a common place. In dormitories, the entire residence hall may be affected by the actions of one member—what kind of ethics then follows?

Imagine being without all of these relationships. Can you picture it at all? Remember that it is not simply a matter of being a “loner,” say, for loners still live in society, among other creatures, and so on (in fact to some degree they may consciously live *against* others, which paradoxically enough is a very strong form of relationship). Can you even begin to conceive yourself without a history, or a people, or a language? And again, if not, what follows?

Would you want to be a member of Akan or Tewa society? Why or why not? Also, in what ways are our own societies more similar to the Akan or Tewa than at first it may seem? And again, if there are specific ways in which you do think you’d like a community more like theirs, what are some ways within our own traditions to bring it about?

8.2 APPLYING THE ETHICS OF RELATIONSHIP

For the fourth and final time, here is a set of ethical questions and issues to work through from the perspective of the family of values we have been studying, this time the Ethics of Relationship. Again, pick two or three that especially interest you, or consider them all if you can. Ask in each case how the Ethics of Relationship might answer the questions or orient us toward the issue. Remember that the aim of this exercise is to *explore*, not necessarily to arrive at some final, definitive, fully confident answer. How do your answers to these questions compare to your answers to the same questions in chapters 5, 6, and 7?

1. ETHICS AT SCHOOL

Does the Ethics of Relationship have anything to say about how you conduct yourself as a student? After all, being a student is a relationship, isn't it? Indeed it is an entire bundle of them: relationships between you and your teachers; between you and your classmates; between you and those who might wish to be in your shoes but can't be, and those whom your learning might benefit; and between you and all of those who developed the knowledge and skills that you are learning, sometimes at immense costs to themselves. More than a few people gave their very lives for some particular piece of knowledge that today comes to us innocuously in some dry textbook. Others gave everything for the simple right to pursue such knowledge or teach it to others. How do you as a student take on all of this?

What about teachers, professors, and for that matter authors of textbooks? Does the Ethics of Relationship have anything to say about the way they (we) conduct themselves (ourselves)? We too stand in all of the complex relationships just mentioned, including in a special relationship both to others in our fields, present and past, and also to you.

Again, you might consult the introduction to **Going Farther #9** (soon to follow!) for more prompts and details on thinking about the ethics of school in this way.

Does the Ethics of Relationship have anything to say about how colleges and universities themselves are set up and governed? Are they currently recognized as systems of relationships? What would they look like if they were (or, were more so)? Are there alternative schools that are more genuinely communities? What are their key features?

What about grading systems? What about pedagogy and the curriculum? About the place of schooling in life generally? Has the Ethics of Relationship anything to say about the moral value of education itself? And does the subject of study matter?

2. ETHICS AT WORK

Does the Ethics of Relationship have anything to say about how you conduct yourself as a worker? After all, being a worker is a relationship, isn't it? Indeed it is an entire bundle of them: relationships between you and your employer or employees, your managers and/or those you may manage; with your co-workers; with customers, if you have them; with others in the industry; with stockholders (if there are any) and/or others who support your work and workplace and field?

Or again, how about your relationship not just with stockholders or other supporters, but also with "stake-holders"—those who are affected by the work you do and how you do it, whether either you or they choose this relationship? What might "interbeing" mean in this case?

Correspondingly, does the Ethics of Relationship have anything to say about how work itself is set up in our society? Obligations and responsibilities are not just one-way. You have them as a worker, but also about workplaces'

and society's obligations and responsibilities to *you* arising from the same relationship? Work could be set up in very different ways. How might it be set up differently if it were fully understood in terms of an ethics of care and community? Would it be better? Why?

Most generally, has the Ethics of Relationship anything to say about the moral value of work itself? Is devotion to work in some way a consequence of recognizing ourselves to be in relationships of dependence and gratefulness? Why, why not? Does the kind of work matter?

3. DRUGS

According to the Ethics of Relationship, what exactly, if anything, is morally wrong with using mind-altering drugs, from marijuana to cocaine, Ecstasy, etc.? Why? Is there any morally relevant difference between these drugs, from the perspective of the Ethics of Relationship? (Oh, and should alcohol be included in this categorization? Why or why not?)

Probably it is clear that many drugs have deleterious effects on human relationships. Utilitarian pleasure and pain calculations are relevant as usual. A more uncertain and provocative question would be: might there be relationships that (certain?) drugs *enhance* or enable?

4. DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

An economic system is a system of relationships too, even a community of sorts. Everyone is supposed to acquiesce in it; most of us contribute to it and expect it to contribute to us. Is it therefore arguable that any such community of mutual dependence and benefit also needs to secure at least the basic needs of all of its members? What are the legitimate expectations of members of such a community?

In particular, does the Ethics of Relationship have anything to say about today's highly unequal distribution of income and wealth in the United States and many similar countries? Are there some extremes of inequality that transgress community? If so what are they? How are they to be determined?

The text speaks of the limits of individualism. The Akan or Tewa say, "Life is mutual aid." How would "mutual aid" apply in the economic sphere?

Most indigenous societies have developed elaborate means to keep serious inequalities from developing. Some mandate ritual givaways. Others are organized around non-durable goods, so that accumulation makes no sense past the point of what a person or family can use to meet current needs. Some more modern societies accept market-based inequalities for luxury goods but systematically plan for relatively equal or need- or merit-based access to basic social goods such as education and health care. Consider these and other similar measures from the standpoint of an Ethics of Relationship.

5. OTHER ANIMALS

With its attentiveness to feeling and commitment to the open heart, Care Ethics is presumably especially open to the suffering (and joys) of other animals—though some care ethicists, not wanting to embrace an uncritical-seeming “sentimentalism,” resist making this move automatic. Certainly any Ethics of Relationship will attend to actual, existing relationships, as well as historically well-established modes of relationship, rather than restricting itself in advance to only a few.

The record is mixed. People certainly have deeply caring relationships with certain animals we keep as pets, like cats and dogs, but at the same time we hold other, similar or even more intelligent and sensitive animals (pigs, for example) at arm’s length and allow them to be killed and consumed in immense numbers. Do we save ourselves from relational obligations to them by holding them at a distance in this way, refusing relationship? Does it matter that we *could* have much closer relationships with them, though in fact we don’t? (Or perhaps it matters, but not to the Ethics of Relationship?)

Pet-keeping itself is not necessarily morally unproblematic either. Can you see difficulties with it from the standpoint of an Ethics of Relationship—or other families of moral values?

Historically, according to philosopher Mary Midgley (b. 1919), humans and certain other domestic animals lived together in mutually dependent “mixed communities.” These were working animals, not pets, and often were used for food as well—yet they were *not* held at arm’s length. How do you think this was possible to still eat them?

Or again: Oren Lyons tells us that indigenous people’s thinking casts other creatures as our brothers (siblings). They are understood as sentient and sensitive beings, and welcomed among “all our relations.” If this is a new idea to you, what do you think it would be like to actually experience other creatures this way? Meanwhile, what do you make of the fact that, even so, indigenous peoples are rarely vegetarian? Members of a specific clan may not hunt or eat their clan animals, but they will hunt and eat others (and others’), and vice versa. What kind of “relationship” is this? Are native peoples wildly inconsistent in this, or is something else going on?

6. CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change will affect the entire human future, including our remote descendants out to the seventh generation and far beyond. According to the Great Law of the Iroquois, it matters, and profoundly: we are in relationship with them. It is a bit of a one-way relationship, though, isn’t it? We are asked to care for them, but what do they do for us?

Or perhaps this is not the right question. Maybe they *will* care for us—treasuring our memory, and passing on the gift that we give them to *their* seventh generation, an endless sequence of care and gratefulness . . . just as

Earth was passed on to us by our own ancestors. In this case, is the Ethics of Relationship partly an imperative to “pay it forward”?

Aldo Leopold suggests that we think of ourselves as just “plain members and citizens” of the land community, and that this relationship is the basis of the Land Ethic in turn. To adapt a famous line attributed to Chief Seattle, the land doesn’t belong to us, we belong to it. As Leopold puts it, we are to orient ourselves by the good of the biotic system as a whole. But in how strong a sense can we say that the “land,” in Leopold’s sense of the biotic system, is in fact a “community”? Mightn’t this stretch the term past some logical breaking point? In human communities, after all, part of the connection between the members is some sense of mutual obligation: again, a sense of reciprocity. It is harder to see that reciprocity holds in relation to the Land. Is this a problem?

Humans have managed to live in harmony with Earth for almost all of our species’ history. The relationship held. Why has it failed in contemporary times? (Big question!) How do we find our way back—or to a new kind of harmonious relationship?

NOTES

Carol Gilligan is quoted from *In a Different Voice* (Harvard University Press, 1982, 1993), pp. 30–31. The quote in the text about Gilligan’s findings is from Eve Browning Cole’s *Philosophy and Feminist Criticism: An Introduction* (Paragon House, 1993), pp. 105–106. In work that followed the more widely known research featured in the text, Gilligan concluded that both Care Ethics and the more traditional “Justice Ethics” are represented by both males *and* females. A full ethical toolbox needs to recognize both sets of values (and more).

Against Kant’s dismissal of the emotions, see Lawrence Blum, *Friendship, Altruism, and Morality* (Routledge, 1982). For a thorough and wide-ranging contemporary exposition of Care Ethics, see Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political, and Global* (Oxford, 2007). A useful survey of a variety of positions in Care Ethics is chapter 8, “Care-Focused Feminism,” in Rosemarie Tong’s *Feminist Thought: A More Comprehensive Introduction* (Westview, 2008).

Janie Ward is quoted from Gilligan and Ward, “Foreword,” *Race-ing Moral Formation: African American Perspectives on Care and Justice* (Teacher’s College Press, 2004), p. xi. Vanessa Siddle Walker and John R. Snarey are cited from the same book’s “Introduction: Race Matters in Moral Formation,” pp. 10–11, and “Conclusion: Primary Values and Developing Virtues of African American Ethics,” pp. 136–137. In the same book, see also Walker’s essay with Renarta Tompkins, “Caring in the Past: The Case of a Southern Segregated African American School,” pp. 77–92. Classic in this area is Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought* (Routledge, revised 10th anniversary edition, 2000).

David Abram is cited from *The Spell of the Sensuous* (Pantheon, 1996), p. 262. On Thich Nhat Hanh's notion of "Interbeing," a good place to start is his "The Sun in my Heart," from his *Love in Action: Writings on Nonviolent Social Change* (Parallax Press, 1993). Albert Schweitzer is cited from his *Out of My Life and Thought* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1949), pp. 158–159. Aldo Leopold's essay "The Land Ethic" can be found at the very end of *A Sand County Almanac* (Oxford University Press, 1949, 1968)—the whole book is well worth the read. For a general "next step" into environmental ethics, see my collection *An Invitation to Environmental Philosophy* (Oxford University Press, 1999).

In the last section, Chief Oren Lyons is quoted from "Our Mother Earth," *Parabola* 7 (1984): 1, pp. 91–93.

For Mary Midgley's account of "mixed communities," see her *Beast and Man: The Roots of Human Nature* (Routledge, 1978) and *Animals and Why They Matter* (University of Georgia Press, 1998).



GOING FARTHER #9

BUILDING A STUDENT CODE OF ETHICS

Question #1 in Exercises 5.2, 6.2, 7.2, and 8.2 invited you to consider how each of the four families of moral values in turn relates to your role as a student. It would be wise to go back now and recall the answers you gave each time “Ethics at School” came up. You will need all of that thinking, and more, to take on the task that this **Going Farther** poses: to work out a Code of Ethics for students for your fellow students and yourself at your school. If your school already has such a code, you can work to deepen and develop it. If it doesn’t, you’re writing the first draft.

WHAT’S WRONG WITH PLAGIARISM?

This exercise has several steps. The first step is to consider one aspect of the student role in detail. It’s very specific: consider the question of *plagiarism*. Plagiarism.org defines it as “copying another’s work or borrowing someone else’s original ideas,” such as passing off someone else’s ideas or words as your own, without crediting the source, and claiming originality for an idea or a product that is actually derived from an existing source. How might we think of plagiarism from a moral point of view?

Many teachers would probably agree with University of South Florida Professor Brook Sadler that what she calls “the wrongs of plagiarism” are often not evident to students. Sadler reports that when she catches a student who has plagiarized a paper, the student may admit that they know plagiarism is wrong, but beyond “a stammering attempt to own up to ‘cheating,’ they don’t really know *why*.” In Sadler’s view, plagiarism actually offends morality in a number of varied and deep ways. Let us begin with her list, from a her widely-read article “The Wrongs of Plagiarism.”

READING 21

“What’s Wrong with Plagiarism?”

BROOK J. SADLER

BROOK J. SADLER is a philosopher and poet who currently teaches Humanities and Cultural Studies at the University of South Florida. This reading is abridged from a longer article that has still more to say about plagiarism!

[First,] plagiarism involves the intent to *deceive*. . . . Deception may be justified under certain circumstances—for instance, where some great good is to be achieved or people’s fundamental rights are to be upheld. However, such justifying conditions are not present in the case of student plagiarism. The only thing to be gained by a student’s plagiarism is a better grade for him or her if the plagiarism is not detected. Putting the point in Kantian terms, the wrong of deception involves treating another as a mere means. The plagiarizing student regards the professor as a mere means to a grade by acting in a way to which the professor could not in principle consent. That is, the professor would not consent to grading a paper that is not the student’s own work; for, the point of grading is, in part, to evaluate the student’s progress—not simply to assess the quality of any random piece of writing—and to provide feedback to enhance the student’s learning. Neither of these ends can be achieved by grading a plagiarized paper.

[Second,] plagiarism violates the trust upon which higher education is established. Students trust that professors will do their best to give them an honest education—not unduly biased, not misrepresenting the facts, not deliberately omitting relevant evidence, not distorting the findings of research in the field, not grading students’ work on the basis of prejudice, personal feeling, or arbitrary criteria. As we are aware, of course, not all professors maintain their part of this trust, and that is wrong. But students also have a part to play in maintaining trust. Professors give time and energy to educating students on the presumption that students are open to *being educated*. When a student commits any form of academic dishonesty, he or she is shutting-down the possibility of being educated; the student does not learn from the effort required to produce the work on her own, nor from the constructive feedback the professor gives in grading the assignment. . . . When students misrepresent their work, they also misrepresent themselves, undercutting the implicit trust that informs the teacher-student relationship: Just as the student must trust that the teacher is knowledgeable and fair in order to believe that there is something to be gained *from* her teaching, the teacher must trust that the student is honest and receptive in order to believe that there is something to be gained *by* her teaching. The trust that underwrites education, especially university education, is disrupted, even annihilated, by academic dishonesty.

Brook J. Sadler, “The wrongs of plagiarism: Ten quick arguments,” *Teaching Philosophy* 30 (3):283–291 (2007). Reproduced with permission of Philosophy Documentation Center.

[Third,] plagiarism is unfair to other students in the class. Especially when the source of the plagiarism is a professional research paper, the plagiarized paper may be much better than the work produced by other students in the class. If a professor does not detect the plagiarism, the fact that the plagiarized paper is of higher quality than others throws off a professor's sense of her students' capabilities regarding the material covered by the assignment. It makes the work of honest students appear comparatively weak. For example, students who might have received A's may receive B's, if the best paper in the class, setting the standard for an A, was plagiarized and the plagiarism goes undetected. Reading student papers [also] helps professors to assess which ideas or concepts students understood and which ones they had difficulty with, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of their writing. This information aids professors in revising their instruction and assignments. When the data (student papers) misrepresents student abilities (because of plagiarism or academic dishonesty), the very quality of the teaching is threatened since professors may rely upon that data to adjust their instruction. . . .

[Fourth,] a student who plagiarizes does not benefit from the process of struggling with the material on her own. She does not truly learn the material or engage the assignment. The quality of her education is thereby diminished. She does not acquire the skills that the assignment requires her to exercise or to develop. With respect to writing papers, a large part of the value of the assignment consists not in the finished product, but in the process of working on it.

[Fifth,] the plagiarizing student indulges in vices. . . . Perhaps it is laziness or a kind of cowardice borne of low self-esteem: The student says, in effect, "This is hard. I am afraid I will fail. So, I won't even try." Indulging this attitude perpetuates the student's inability, ensuring that she does not acquire the skills needed to succeed. The (undetected) plagiarized paper that gets a good grade reinforces the belief that the only way to success is dishonesty, foreclosing the possibility that success (a good grade) could be achieved through effort or that *success may consist in the effort, not the grade*. Plagiarizing students thus habituate themselves to indolence, dishonesty, cowardice, or low self-esteem and incapacitate themselves to do the kind of work assigned.

[Sixth,] students who get away with academic dishonesty may come to believe, quite generally, that the best way to "get ahead" in life is to cheat, deceive, violate trust, or take the easy route. Such a belief may undercut the student's ability to partake of the internal goods of a wide variety of practices, limiting his or her

rewards to the external goods of money or status and instilling a corollary belief that the primary attainments in life are gained through competition with others, not through cooperation or by challenging oneself to meet the standards of excellence established by practices. . . . The student enters the educational arena as a self-interested competitor, in an adversarial stance toward instructors and other students. When this attitude is tolerated, overlooked, or even promoted in the university, it would not be surprising were students to carry it with them to other public contexts, disposing them toward the same kind of anonymous interactions with others, based on privately held ends, competitively fought for on the grounds of self-interest. Such an outlook promotes the idea that public institutions like the university advance no significant social goods and serve no greater purpose than to provide the means to the individual's own private ends.

[Seventh,] unpunished academic dishonesty diminishes the value of a university degree. Employers expect students who graduate from a university to have certain demonstrable skills acquired in their education. For philosophy students, foremost among these "marketable" skills is the ability to write well. Students who plagiarize their way through the degree do not possess these skills. They have not truly earned the degree. This approach is not universalizable; if all students received unearned degrees, there would be no point to giving degrees. In addition, insofar as plagiarizing students fail to master the relevant concepts, arguments, texts, or ideas, conferring degrees upon them degrades the public perception of the value of higher education. When university-educated students do not possess the skills or knowledge to participate intelligently in public discourse or business, it is no wonder if the public harbors a suspicion about the value of higher education. Students who plagiarize are "free-riders" on the system, exploiting the system for their own advantage while undercutting its purpose and value.

[Eighth,] plagiarism and academic dishonesty preclude opportunities for the student both to take pride in creative self-expression and to come to terms with one's epistemic and intellectual limitations. It is sometimes supposed that the problem with plagiarism is that it violates a value characterized as intellectual or scholarly integrity; however, the average (undergraduate) student does not see her- or himself as involved in a long-term intellectual project whose integrity is at stake. The student is simply writing a paper as outlined by the professor's assignment. . . . Hence, the appeal to intellectual or scholarly integrity seems misplaced; research in the field will not be jeopardized by her lapses in citation

or misrepresentation of others' work. Nonetheless, it is awareness of the circumscribed nature of students' papers that can afford students the opportunity to recognize their own epistemic and intellectual limitations in a way that inspires appreciation for the achievements of researchers and scholars. In confronting the difficulty of producing their own work, students stand to gain a valuable form of humility that may inspire further education and stoke curiosity at the same time that it inspires students to take pride in their own intellectual development and to value their own creative expression.

[Finally,] one of the ideas behind higher education is that students can learn something from their courses, from their assignments, from their professors that they cannot learn (at all, as easily, or as well) outside of the university. Since most of what professors teach—the texts and problems and methods—is available through libraries or other resources, the value of university education must consist in something more than the mere content of these texts. One of the distinctive values of university education consists in the interpersonal engagement that happens between students and between professors and students. The university does not exist merely to serve as a conduit for the transference of information: from (anonymous) professor to (anonymous) student, as if the process consisted simply in the handing-off of pre-packaged goods, each package containing exactly the same, precisely-measured and weighed contents, stamped with a bar-code ensuring uniformity. The interpersonal engagement that constitutes higher-education transforms the content of what is taught and what it means. We do not merely circulate a product, knowledge; we engage each other *as knowers*. Although I think this must represent the normative ideal in any discipline, it is especially and profoundly true for the discipline of philosophy in which we seek to transform ourselves through argument, analysis, and the exchange of ideas. Academic dishonesty or plagiarism effaces the student; it presents someone else (through the plagiarized paper) in the place of the student herself. Implicit in this act is the belief that higher education consists in the transference of content: The student hands off to the professor a piece of content, picked up from elsewhere (the internet, the library, another student), which the professor will stamp with a grade and return, as though all that were involved were an assessment of the quality of the product, an act exactly like assessing a carton of eggs and stamping it grade A. Although grades *do* represent assessments of quality, the act of grading papers and engaging with students' work involves more than this; it involves an engagement with a particular student's struggle to express herself,

to navigate concepts, to enlarge her worldview, to come to know and to understand. This engagement is not possible when a student plagiarizes, and . . . one of the fundamental and distinguishing features of higher education is the interpersonal engagement it affords, then plagiarism thwarts or defeats that purpose.

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN

Sadler's list of the wrongs of plagiarism is almost a capsule review of the whole of Part II of this book. Notice many themes that should now be familiar—in fact from all four of our families of moral values: the language of virtue and vice, of the “internal goods” of certain academic practices, of Kantian ethics, of the violation of the legitimate expectations of relationships, and more. Who would have thought plagiarism went that deep?

Question #1 in Exercises 5.2, 6.2, 7.2, and 8.2 asked you how each family of moral values illuminates “Ethics at School.” Your challenge now is to take Sadler's probing of plagiarism as a model and spell out other aspects of basic need and legitimate expectations of students and learning in general.

Remember that the Ethics of Relationship locates moral values within relationships, most of which are particular, like families or communities. You might begin, then, by exploring the ways that your college or university is a community. Physically, obviously, large numbers of people spend a great deal of time together in shared activities. The fundamental shared activity, equally obviously, is teaching and learning. The Ethics of Virtue locates moral values within such specific social practices and roles. You are *students*, here for a specific purpose: to study and grow, to master both the general knowledge it has been deemed necessary for you to have to productively enter the larger community, and specific fields as you choose. Many values, both moral and non-moral, arise as a consequence.

There are other communities within the largest one. Intellectually, the faculty may think of themselves as a local community of scholars (especially in smaller institutions: look up the etymology of the word “college,” for example) through which generations of students pass. The school itself can be viewed as a community over generations, all the way back to its founding, which may have been hundreds of years ago. From the point of view of the disciplines, the community of scholars is sometimes pictured as including all highly educated people in that field (the granting of a PhD, for example, by examination by a committee of established PhD-holders, is a rite of passage into an exclusive and demanding kind of community), and/or again may be pictured historically, linking today's scholars with an honored tradition that in the case of some fields, like philosophy, reaches back thousands of years.

As a student, meanwhile, you are invited to embrace and carry on the many and varied student-life traditions of your school, from certain rituals and allegiances to certain sports teams to a long-term loyalty to the school and to fellow graduates. (That is, in a sense there is also a student community apart from the faculty and apart from the school.) Yet another image of community is the community of its alumni/ae—a community across time. Every year during the commencement ceremony at Elon University, the president welcomes the graduates into the community of alumni/ae. “You may leave Elon,” he says, “but Elon is not leaving you.”

Exercise 7.2 asked you what are the “internal goods,” in MacIntyre’s terms, of the practices of teaching and learning. What virtues are thereby defined for students? That is, what is it to be a *good* student, specifically in the moral sense that the Ethics of Virtue derives from shared practices, in the same way that a person may be a good auto mechanic or a good parent? Develop and deepen your answers now.

And what values arise, as the Ethics of Relationship would have it, out of the many relations of trust and dependency that make up college or university communities? Again, develop and deepen the answers you gave to this question in Exercise 8.2. For example, consider values that address students’ relationship to each other: in- and out-of-classroom demeanors that safeguard and/or enhance learning. Part of my work for Elon was on a committee setting out guidelines for campus technology use. The ethics of being a good student in this sense, we decided, include everything from taking care of the hardware to avoiding email scams or even weak passwords that may lead to crashes or slowdowns in the university system, inconveniencing everyone. It also includes not making or uploading video recordings of anyone without their knowledge and permission (a recent issue). Can you articulate the underlying community values that put all of these behaviors out of bounds? And what alternative behaviors should be expected or required? That is, can and should a student code of ethics tell us what to do and not just what *not* to do?

Consider values that address students’ relationship to teachers, to the faculty, from the respect due to their own learning and their devotion, to classroom demeanor. What are teachers’ obligations to students in turn? What are appropriate processes for dealing with problems that may arise in this relationship, especially when one side or the other is not holding up its end? Many schools have judicial boards or similar mechanisms to deal with the worst cases, but is a legal model appropriate for schools? Could other approaches serve learning better?

Academic honesty is one example of a value, according to Sadler, that arises out of the special relationship of students both to professors and to knowledge as such. Are there others—perhaps more broadly positive or aspirational values? Is there an obligation to *add* to knowledge, for example? How about sharing knowledge with others who are less fortunate?

Consider values that address students’ relationship to the institution. For example, what are your obligations, if any, to your school simply because it is your school? When I take students abroad, I urge them to think of themselves as ambassadors for Elon University—that is, to think of themselves not just as individuals but also as taking the institution out into the world. It is different from going abroad on your own – and even then you may be seen, like it or not, as a representative of some country or ethnicity, at least.

Consider the generations of generosity that make your own education possible, on the part of previous graduates, teachers, local craftspeople, taxpayers, and many other supporters and donors of many kinds. What follows? Is it now your responsibility to “pay it forward,” just as they did? When Elon’s president welcomes new graduates to the community of alumni/ae, he adds: “You’ll be hearing from us shortly.” Meaning: you’ll be getting requests for donations. The newly minted graduates laugh, but they know exactly what he is saying. The obligation is real. Others made this happen for you. Part of “graduating” is switching roles.

You may consider still other relationships that may give rise to moral expectations for students. Your relationship to your parents, for example, who may be supporting you financially, helping to make this experience possible. For that matter, what of your relationship to the generations before them, who are much less likely to have had this opportunity and might have only distantly dreamed of it for their descendants? Today, here you are. To what extent might you consider something like a seven-generation perspective here? Your

ancestors (and descendants) bear you up, as you bear them up. What does this mean for students? Do other generations, past or future, have legitimate expectations to which you as a student should also respond?

A DELIVERABLE

Once you have explored all of this, the final step in this **Going Farther** exercise is to “go farther” indeed: I suggest that you try to pull it together into a comprehensive Student Code of Ethics that might be one of your class’s contributions to your school.

You could start by reviewing your school’s honor code and/or any other ethical statements or codes that your school may already have. Why do these codes say what they say? Are they enough? What other kinds of ethical obligations would you argue specifically apply to students? Why?

In my experience, most student codes of ethics confine themselves to certain mostly negative kinds of issues, like plagiarism or basic dormitory etiquette or substance abuse. Mostly they lay out sets of proscriptions—what *not* to do, a kind of legalistic boundary setting. You might aim to improve these sorts of codes in two ways. First, can you make the codes more than negative? Consider their deeper rationales. Are there not positive implications also, for being a good student? Can you spell out a persuasive and even inspiring ethical rationale for such rules? (That is, not just that you should avoid some behavior because it’s illegal or disruptive, etc.) How do we have to understand ourselves, and moral values, to see that these rules make sense and apply to us?

Such codes also tend, again in my experience, to be fairly narrowly defined. Typically they are put forward by Residence Life offices or other administrative offices that focus on judicial sorts of models and offenses. But what about a general Student Code of Ethics that starts with the widest values—that takes us all the way back, again, to the fundamental practices and relationships that structure educational institutions as such? What would a Student Code of Ethics look like if it spoke first and foremost to them?

Talk to the relevant administrators and student leaders as you explore your school’s existing code and develop your own. Find ways to offer your new code to your school’s community for their consideration and discussion. What’s the next step then?



GOING FARTHER #10

VALUES ON THE EDGE?

Part II has now surveyed four broad families of moral values. When chapter 4 first introduced the families of values, we very briefly raised the question whether there might be other families of moral values as well—perhaps newly emerging kinds of values, or long-standing types of values not so visible to moralists and philosophers who have devoted themselves to the sorts of values we have considered. Yes, I said, there might be, though that does not detract from the usefulness of the families. But what sorts of values these might be, I did not say.

This **Going Farther** reading suggests one possibility. Here Edward Abbey, a classic wilderness curmudgeon, explains why he loves the desert—why he values it and why you and I should too. You might expect a nice poetic rhapsody to the loveliness of the desert, making us think of cactus-and-sunset pictures in Sierra Club calendars or travel magazines. But this is not what Abbey says—just the opposite. First he details the desert's horrors; then he tells you how to prepare to hike there if you're crazy enough to go in the first place (not that he himself ever prepares at all); then he reminds you to disrupt any mining or hunting or road-building activities you happen to run across; and finally he tells a story about an ancient arrow pointing at nothingness.

What are we to make of all this? There are no appeals here to happiness—indeed emphatically the opposite, at least in the sense of pleasure. No persons need apply either. Virtue would apparently tell us not to go to the desert in the first place. And even relationship—the family of values that might first come to mind with regard to nature—is denied: Abbey's main argument is that the desert is an inhuman place. Just as the West's great religious traditions also insisted for millennia: the wilderness, the desert or other, is god-forsaken, not a place of value.

Yet Abbey *is*, after all, writing about love. He is calling on certain values. And in this he speaks for what may be a newly emerging understanding and respect for wilderness, perhaps even an *embrace* of its radical inhumanity. Anyway, this is your challenge. See if you can figure out what these new values are. What is Abbey saying about the arrow pointing at nothingness, for example? What kinds of values is he so proudly appealing to here?

Having spelled out some of Abbey's values, you can then ask the other question that naturally arises in chapter 4: Are the values to which he appeals—and that you have just carefully spelled out—*moral* values? Can love for the other-than-human—even *inhuman*—also be moral, be ethical? Why or why not?

Finally, don't overlook the irony in this piece. That too calls for some careful interpretation. The long list of desert horrors comes right after Abbey tells us that he loved the desert "at first sight." Somehow the horrors make the desert *loveable*—how? And why does he tell us to pull up survey stakes, take out billboards, etc., etc.? Isn't that illegal?

READING 22

“The Great American Desert”

EDWARD ABBEY

EDWARD ABBEY (1927–1989) was an American nature writer, backcountry hiker, and militant defender of wilderness whose writings include the classic *Desert Solitaire* as well as the controversial novel *The Monkeywrench Gang*, which allegedly inspired some infamous environmental sabotage in the 1980s and 1990s.

In my case it was love at first sight. This desert, all deserts, any desert. No matter where my head and feet may go, my heart and my entrails stay behind, here on the clean, true, comfortable rock, under the black sun of God's forsaken country. When I take on my next incarnation, my bones will remain bleaching nicely in a stone gulch under the rim of some faraway plateau, way out there in the back of beyond. An unrequited and excessive love, inhuman no doubt but painful anyhow, especially when I see my desert under attack. “The one death I cannot bear,” said the Sonoran-Arizonan poet Richard Shelton. The kind of love that makes a man selfish, possessive, irritable. If you're thinking of a visit, my natural reaction is like a rattlesnake's—to warn you off. What I want to say goes something like this.

Survival Hint #1: Stay out of there. Don't go. Stay home and read a good book, this one for example. The Great American Desert is an awful place. People get hurt, get sick, get lost out there. Even if you survive, which is not certain, you will have a miserable time. The desert is for movies and God-intoxicated mystics, not for family recreation.

Let me enumerate the hazards. First the Walapai tiger, also known as conenose kissing bug. *Triatoma protracta* is a true bug, black as sin, and it flies through the night quiet as an assassin. It does not attack directly like a mosquito or deerfly, but alights at a discreet distance, undetected, and creeps upon you, its hairy little feet making not the slightest noise. The kissing bug is fond of warmth and like Dracula requires mammalian blood for sustenance. When

“The Great American Desert” from *THE JOURNEY HOME* by Edward Abbey, copyright ©1977 by Edward Abbey. Used by permission of Dutton, an imprint of Penguin Publishing Group, a division of Penguin Random House LLC. All rights reserved.

it reaches you the bug crawls onto your skin so gently, so softly that unless your senses are hyperacute you feel nothing. Selecting a tender point, the bug slips its conical proboscis into your flesh, injecting a poisonous anesthetic. If you are asleep you will feel nothing. If you happen to be awake you may notice the faintest of pinpricks, hardly more than a brief ticklish sensation, which you will probably disregard. But the bug is already at work. Having numbed the nerves near the point of entry the bug proceeds (with a sigh of satisfaction, no doubt) to withdraw blood. When its belly is filled, it pulls out, backs off, and waddles away, so drunk and gorged it cannot fly.

At about this time the victim awakes, scratching at a furious itch. If you recognize the symptoms at once, you can sometimes find the bug in your vicinity and destroy it. But revenge will be your only satisfaction. Your night is ruined. If you are of average sensitivity to a kissing bug's poison, your entire body breaks out in hives, skin aflame from head to toe. Some people become seriously ill, in many cases requiring hospitalization. Others recover fully after five or six hours except for a hard and itchy swelling, which may endure for a week.

After the kissing bug, you should beware of rattlesnakes; we have half a dozen species, all offensive and dangerous, plus centipedes, millipedes, tarantulas, black widows, brown recluses, Gila monsters, the deadly poisonous coral snakes, and giant hairy desert scorpions. Plus an immense variety and near-infinite number of ants, midges, gnats, blood-sucking flies, and blood-guzzling mosquitoes. (You might think the desert would be spared at least mosquitoes? Not so. Peer in any water hole by day: swarming with mosquito larvae. Venture out on a summer's eve: The air vibrates with their mournful keening.) Finally, where the desert meets the sea, as on the coasts of Sonora and Baja California, we have the usual assortment of obnoxious marine life: sandflies, ghost crabs, stingrays, electric jellyfish, spiny sea urchins, man-eating sharks, and other creatures so distasteful one prefers not even to name them.

It has been said, and truly, that everything in the desert either stings, stabs, stinks, or sticks. You will find the flora here as venomous, hooked, barbed, thorny, prickly, needled, saw-toothed, hairy, stickered, mean, bitter, sharp, wiry, and fierce as the animals. Something about the desert inclines all living things to harshness and acerbity. The soft evolve out. Except for sleek and oily growths like the poison ivy—oh yes, indeed—that flourish in sinister profusion on the dank walls about the quicksand down in those corridors of gloom and labyrinthine monotony that men call canyons.

We come now to the third major hazard, which is sunshine. Too much of a good thing can be fatal. Sunstroke, heatstroke, and dehydration are common misfortunes in the bright American Southwest. If you can avoid the insects, reptiles, and arachnids, the cactus and the ivy, the smog of the southwestern cities, and the lung fungus of the desert valleys (carried by dust in the air), you cannot escape the desert sun. Too much exposure to it eventually causes, quite literally, not merely sunburn but skin cancer.

Much sun, little rain also means an arid climate. Compared with the high humidity of more hospitable regions, the dry heat of the desert seems at first not terribly uncomfortable—sometimes even pleasant. But that sensation of comfort is false, a deception, and therefore all the more dangerous, for it induces overexertion and an insufficient consumption of water, even when water is available. This leads to various internal complications, some immediate—sunstroke, for example—and some not apparent until much later. Mild but prolonged dehydration, continued over a span of months or years, leads to the crystallization of mineral solutions in the urinary tract, that is, to what urologists call urinary calculi or kidney stones. A disability common in all the world's arid regions. . . .

Up north in the Great Basin Desert, on the Plateau Province, in the canyon country, your heart will break, seeing the strip mines open up and the power plants rise where only cowboys and Indians and J. Wesley Powell ever roamed before.

Nevertheless, all is not lost; much remains, and I welcome the prospect of an army of lug-soled hiker's boots on the desert trails. To save what wilderness is left in the American Southwest—and in the American Southwest only the wilderness is worth saving—we are going to need all the recruits we can get. All the hands, heads, bodies, time, money, effort we can find. Presumably—and the Sierra Club, the Wilderness Society, the Friends of the Earth, the Audubon Society, the Defenders of Wildlife operate on this theory—those who learn to love what is spare, rough, wild, undeveloped, and unbroken will be willing to fight for it, will help resist the strip miners, highway builders, land developers, weapons testers, power producers, tree chainers, clear cutters, oil drillers, dam beavers, subdividers—the list goes on and on—before that zinc-hearted, termite-brained, squint-eyed, near-sighted, greedy crew succeeds in completely californicating what still survives of the Great American Desert.

So much for the Good Cause. Now what about desert hiking itself, you may ask. I'm glad you asked that question. I firmly believe that one should never—I repeat *never*—go out into that formidable wasteland of cactus, heat, serpents, rock, scrub, and thorn

without careful planning, thorough and cautious preparation, and complete—never mind the expense!—*complete* equipment. My motto is: Be Prepared.

That is my belief and that is my motto. My practice, however, is a little different. I tend to go off in a more or less random direction myself, half-baked, half-assed, half-cocked, and half-ripped. Why? Well, because I have an idolent and melancholy nature and don't care to be bothered getting all those *things* together—all that bloody *gear*—maps, light, inspirational poetry, water, food—and because anyhow I approach nature with a certain surly ill-will, daring Her to make trouble. Later . . . I may wish I had packed that something extra: matches perhaps, to mention one useful item, or maybe a spoon to eat my gruel with. . . .

A few tips on desert etiquette:

1. Carry a cooking stove, if you must cook. Do not burn desert wood, which is rare and beautiful and required ages for its creation (an ironwood tree lives for over 1,000 years and juniper almost as long).
2. If you must, out of need, build a fire, then for God's sake allow it to burn itself out before you leave—do not bury it, as Boy Scouts and Campfire Girls do, under a heap of mud or sand. Scatter the ashes; replace any rocks you may have used in constructing a fireplace; do all you can to obliterate the evidence that you camped here. (The Search & Rescue Team may be looking for you.)
3. Do not bury garbage—the wildlife will only dig it up again. Burn what will burn and pack out the rest. The same goes for toilet paper. Don't bury it, burn it.
4. Do not bathe in desert pools, natural tanks, tinajas, potholes. Drink what water you need, take what you need, and leave the rest for the next hiker and more important for the bees, birds, and animals—bighorn sheep, coyotes, lions, foxes, badgers, deer, wild pigs, wild horses—whose lives depend on that water.
5. Always remove and destroy survey stakes, flagging, advertising signboards, mining claim markers, animal traps, poisoned bait, seismic exploration geophones, and other such artifacts of industrialism. The men who put those things there are up to no good and it is our duty to confound them. Keep America Beautiful. Grow a Beard. Take a Bath. Burn a Billboard.

Anyway—why go into the desert? Really, why do it? That sun, roaring at you all day long. The fetid, tepid, vapid little water holes

slowly evaporating under a scum of grease, full of cannibal beetles, spotted toads, horsehair worms, liver flukes, and down at the bottom, inevitably, the pale cadaver of a ten-inch centipede. Those pink rattlesnakes down in The Canyon, those diamondback monsters thick as a truck driver's wrist that lurk in shady places along the trail, those unpleasant solpugids and unnecessary Jerusalem crickets that scurry on dirty claws across your face at night. Why? The rain that comes down like lead shot and wrecks the trail, those sudden rockfalls of obscure origin that crash like thunder ten feet behind you in the heart of a dead-still afternoon. The ubiquitous buzzard, so patient—but only so patient. . . . The ragweed, the tumbleweed, the Jimson weed, the snakeweed. The scorpion in your shoe at dawn. The dreary wind that blows all spring, the psychedelic Joshua trees waving their arms at you on moonlight nights. Sand in the soup de jour. Halazone tablets in your canteen. The barren hills that always go up, which is bad, or down, which is worse. Those canyons like catacombs with quicksand lapping at your crotch. Hollow, mummified horses with forelegs casually crossed, dead for ten years, leaning against the corner of a barbed-wire fence. Packhorses at night, iron-shod, clattering over the slickrock through your camp. The last tin of tuna, two flat tires, not enough water and a forty-mile trek to Tule Well. An osprey on a cardón cactus, snatching the head off a living fish—always the best part first. The hawk sailing by at 200 feet, a squirming snake in its talons. Salt in the drinking water. Salt, selenium, arsenic, radon and radium in the water, in the gravel, in your bones. Water so hard it bends light, drills holes in rock and chokes up your radiator. Why go there? Those places with the hard-case names: Starvation Creek, Poverty Knoll, Hungry Valley, Bitter Springs, Last Chance Canyon, Dungeon Canyon, Whipsaw Flat, Dead Horse Point, Scorpion Flat, Dead Man Draw, Stinking Spring, Camino del Diablo, Jornada del Muerto . . . Death Valley.

Well then, why indeed go walking into the desert, that grim ground, that bleak and lonesome land where, as Genghis Khan said of India, “the heat is bad and the water makes men sick”?

Why the desert, when you could be strolling along the golden beaches of California? Camping by a stream of pure Rocky Mountain spring water in colorful Colorado? Loafing through a laurel slick in the misty hills of North Carolina? Or getting your head mashed in the greasy alley behind the Elysium Bar and Grill in Hoboken, New Jersey? Why the desert, given a world of such splendor and variety?

A friend and I took a walk around the base of a mountain up beyond Coconino County, Arizona. This was a mountain we'd been planning to circumambulate for years. Finally we put on our walking shoes and did it. About halfway around this mountain, on the third or fourth day, we paused for a while—two days—by the side of a stream, which the Navajos call Nasja because of the amber color of the water. (Caused perhaps by juniper roots—the water seems safe enough to drink.) On our second day there I walked down the stream, alone, to look at the canyon beyond. I entered the canyon and followed it for half the afternoon, for three or four miles, maybe, until it became a gorge so deep, narrow and dark, full of water and the inevitable quagmires of quicksand, that I turned around and looked for a way out. A route other than the way I'd come, which was crooked and uncomfortable and buried—I wanted to see what was up on top of this world. I found a sort of chimney flue on the east wall, which looked plausible, and sweated and cursed my way up through that until I reached a point where I could walk upright, like a human being. Another 300 feet of scrambling brought me to the rim of the canyon. No one, I felt certain, had ever before departed Nasja Canyon by that route.

But someone had. Near the summit I found an arrow sign, three feet long, formed of stones and pointing off into the north toward those same old purple vistas, so grand, immense, and mysterious, of more canyons, more mesas and plateaus, more mountains, more cloud-dappled sun-spangled leagues of desert sand and desert rock, under the same old wide and aching sky.

The arrow pointed into the north. But what was it pointing *at*? I looked at the sign closely and saw that those dark, desert-varnished stones had been in place for a long, long time; they rested in compacted dust. They must have been there for a century at least. I followed the direction indicated and came promptly to the rim of another canyon and a drop-off straight down of a good 500 feet. Not that way, surely. Across this canyon was nothing of any unusual interest that I could see—only the familiar sun-blasted sandstone, a few scrubby clumps of blackbrush and prickly pear, a few acres of nothing where only a lizard could graze, surrounded by a few square miles of more nothingness interesting chiefly to horned toads. I returned to the arrow and checked again, this time with field glasses, looking away for as far as my aided eyes could see toward the north, for ten, twenty, forty miles into the distance. I studied the scene with care, looking for an ancient Indian ruin, a

significant cairn, perhaps an abandoned mine, a hidden treasure of some inconceivable wealth, the mother of all mother lodes. . . .

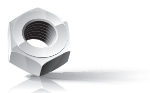
But there was nothing out there. Nothing at all. Nothing but the desert. Nothing but the silent world.

That's why.

III



SKILLS FOR ETHICAL PRACTICE



Minding the Evidence

A diverse set of skills are key to effective ethical practice. These are what Part III of this book explores.

You will also see that these skills themselves embody moral values. The very process of thinking and debating about ethical issues must be ethical itself: that is, the process and not merely (hopefully) the outcome need to take care for the needs and legitimate expectations of others as well as our own. Looking carefully into the facts at stake, listening carefully to each other, and looking as much for areas of agreement and commonality as to the areas of difference, and all the rest of the skills we will practice in Part III, will make your practice both more effective and also more *ethical*.

FACTS AND SOURCES

Moral disagreements are much more than differences about values. Sometimes, indeed, we hardly differ about values at all. Many moral disagreements basically come down to the *facts*: facts about how to produce certain desired effects, for instance, or about what the causes of a current problem really are, or even just about simple and specific information that you could look up in ten minutes on the Web or in the library.

On some issues even a few simple facts can change everything. A young chocolate-loving friend of mine was chagrined to learn that many chocolates are harvested by virtual slave laborers. Now she makes a point of eating only Fair Trade chocolate (and spreading the word: her efforts have led to my telling *you* about this issue, for example). Facts about environmental damage, facts about who is actually “on welfare” and what kind of support they get, facts about the recovery prospects of comatose patients on life support, or about the sweatshops that make collegiate T-shirts, or about the actual history of the institution of marriage: all of these facts may transform our understanding of an issue and our ethical views about it.

Since even a few facts can change everything, then it is part of our responsibility to *seek out* the facts—honestly and persistently. Careful and critical thinking is a virtue! Chapter 2 already pointed out some of the ways in which

it is tempting to short-circuit ethical thinking, like avoiding any thinking at all, or arguing offhandedly or dogmatically. I need to do more than simply assert what I think, more loudly or repetitively perhaps, or cherry-pick a few supposed facts to support my established opinions. I may even need to question my established opinions; but at the very least I need to offer decent and thoughtful reasons for them. Even when we commit ourselves to think seriously and mind the evidence, though, the task can be challenging.

WHAT IS AT STAKE?

The first step is to discern and clarify the underlying factual questions in pressing moral issues. How well can a normal person live without meat, for example, and how much animal suffering does a non-meat diet actually alleviate? Do children raised by same-sex couples grow up any more sexually confused than the average adolescent? When and where is “restorative justice”—reconciliation rather than retribution—possible? How much of global climate change is due to human activity, especially burning so much oil and coal?

These are real questions, and they are factual. That is, actual evidence is available. By now many children have been raised by same-sex couples, for instance. No one—neither side—is entitled to make assumptions about them as a whole group without actually checking out such data as we have.

Another factual question: Does the average mother on welfare have more kids than the average mother not on welfare? Apparently there are all sorts of wild claims about these things circulating online and by word of mouth. But again, it is not hard to find out the actual facts.

Check out even those claims you think are obvious. If they’re central to serious moral disagreements, then they’re pretty likely *not* obvious to others. In any case, you need actual evidence. Don’t just appeal to what “everybody knows.” You don’t know “everybody,” and the people you do know are rather likely to think like you. Even very widely held beliefs can be wrong, for simple reasons. Case in point: though American fear of crime is at an all-time high, and everyone seems to “know” that crime is skyrocketing, in fact it isn’t. What’s really increased dramatically is crime coverage on TV. Today we’re steeped in crime news constantly—some local “news” is little more than crime reports—and of course it is quite real, but it is certainly not the whole story, or even necessarily so widespread. Overall this kind of “news,” true as each item may be, creates a false impression. Think, think, think!

GETTING THE FACTS

Is it ethically better to drive more fuel-efficient cars? It partly depends on how fuel-efficient cars can get, and at what cost. My students were discussing this question one day when several of them began to debate very vocally

about it. One argued that cars could easily be ten times more efficient than they are now. The other acknowledged that some hybrids now get two or three times the mileage of the average car but argued that these are specialty cars—expensive and hard to get—and that seriously higher efficiency is just wishful thinking.

Well, I said, why don't you find out? No point in having a debate as if this were just a contest for the firmest opinion or loudest voice. There are facts of the matter; there is actual data—go find out. In fact, I assigned them to do so.

Next class, we had the actual facts before us. The average American-made car, it turns out, only gets around 23 miles per gallon right now. This figure drops significantly when you include SUVs and vans. It also turns out that there are indeed cars, right now, that get well over 100 mpg—adaptations of currently available hybrids, with a plug-in device for recharging the car batteries overnight from line current. The same vehicles *can* average over 200 mpg under the right conditions. On the other hand, these are quite special conditions and materials. Mostly the super-high-mileage cars remain “concept cars” at this point.

So both students were right in a sense. *Nearly* ten times better mileage (200+ mpg) is possible (at least going by the overall passenger fleet average of 23 mpg rather than the average for new cars, which is rising into the 30s), *but* right now, at least, it is a stretch. Even more important, though, when these students came back with what they'd learned (I assigned it as a joint project), our discussion itself was transformed. It was no longer a contest of off-the-cuff opinions competing to defeat each other. They were no longer even disagreeing, for one thing. And with a few facts on hand, the ensuing discussion was far more productive.

In 2012 the Obama Administration set a new federal CAFE (Corporate Average Fuel Economy) standard of 54.5 mpg—more than doubling the current standard. Students began to see the possibility. They also asked good questions, like how it might be possible to make plug-in hybrids less costly and more widely available. What's likely to develop in the next few years? Carmakers wildly underestimated the demand for hybrids in the first place. Should we believe them now when they opine that most drivers won't be willing to plug in their cars at night? What if we took the opposite tack and tried to make plug-in cars more chic?

My two at-first-antagonistic students also found out a few other truly amazing facts that I can't resist adding. The absolute worst fuel economy for any car is for some dragsters that consume the equivalent of 24 gallons per mile (that would be about .04 mpg). The absolutely best so far was the PAC-Car II, which really *is* an extremely specialized vehicle. This car got a staggering 12,660 mpg in the 2005 Eco-Marathon. No misprint: that's *twelve thousand, six hundred sixty* miles per gallon. It's also three hundred thousand times better mileage than the dragsters just mentioned. It does look like there is a little room for improvement, doesn't it?

INTERPRETING THE DATA

Some people defend the death penalty by arguing that it deters would-be murderers from committing murders. This is often said to be “obvious.” But is it? This question again takes some careful thinking as well as some open-minded research.

How would you get evidence for or against a deterrence effect? You could compare states with the death penalty to states without it. Or, you could compare U.S. murder rates when the death penalty was widely used to the murder rates when it was barred. These kinds of studies have been done. What do they say? You need to know before you can weigh in on this question.

One widely publicized study from the 1970s correlated the decline in capital punishment in the United States between 1933 and 1969 with a rise in murders and therefore concluded that the death penalty does indeed deter murderers. On the other hand, it’s hard to know what to make of this. It seems far more likely that other huge social changes in the United States between 1933 and 1969 (that is, besides the decline in executions) better account for the increase in murder rates in that period.

Another remarkable statistic is that states with the death penalty on average have *higher* murder rates than states that don’t. Is it possible that the death penalty actually encourages some would-be murderers? Or is the murder rate now higher in death penalty states for reasons unrelated to the death penalty? (Or perhaps such states have enacted the death penalty *because* the murder rate is felt to be unacceptably high?)

So this question, in turns out, can’t be answered with an emphatic yes or no. But we nonetheless learn something very useful: that the actual effects of the death penalty are uncertain. It’s just *not* obvious, either way. That’s a fact too, and it makes a difference. For example, uncertainties about deterrence have pushed some defenders of the death penalty away from utilitarian arguments and toward arguments about justice. They have come to realize that their real reasons for favoring the death penalty do not depend on exactly what effects it may or may not have on murder rates. Contrariwise, the same uncertainties about deterrence have also prompted some utilitarians to come out against the death penalty. That is, they have come to realize that their real reasons for favoring the death penalty are much less solid than they thought, and now conclude that its costs probably outweigh its benefits.

You see, again: it is possible to think intelligently about such issues in the face of complex or surprising evidence. But it is *not* possible to think intelligently about such issues if we don’t look for the evidence at all. So look for it!

WHICH FACTS ARE RELEVANT?

by VANCE RICKS

With some difficult moral issues, it is pretty clear what the underlying factual questions are, even if we may not know where to find answers to them. Some of the examples so far in this chapter are like that: moral debates about how to control pollution, or about the deterrent effects of capital punishment, are ones where we know—or can easily figure out—what the main related factual debates are.

With other difficult moral issues, it may not be so easy to see what the main underlying factual questions are. For example, what factual questions are relevant to a dispute about the moral permissibility of same-sex marriages? Or the opening of adoption files? Or assisted suicide? If you find yourself struggling to figure out what the main “relevant” facts are, keep some of these tips in mind.

1. *Read and listen widely.* Sometimes the best way to see what facts are relevant to a particular moral issue is by reading or listening to a variety of people who are discussing that issue. What are some of the facts that those people bring up? What are some of the facts about which they agree or disagree?

In the case of same-sex marriage, for example, there are many types of facts that people on all sides of the question consider relevant. Many of those facts fall into one or more of these interrelated categories:

- a. **Definitions:** What does “marriage” mean? The definition of “marriage” is complicated by the fact that marriage can be a civil institution, a religious sacrament, or both. For example, it is possible for two (or more) people to be married as part of a religious ceremony, without having that marriage recognized by civil authorities. “Fundamentalist Mormon” churches allow polygynous (more than one wife) marriages, for instance, but no U.S. state currently recognizes polygynous unions as marriages. The converse—civilly-sanctioned marriages that are not recognized by religious authorities—also occurs. The Roman Catholic Church forbids its members to divorce, and it considers a divorced person who remarries to be an adulterer. Along with many Protestant denominations it also does not recognize same-sex unions as marriages, even though same-sex marriage is now legal in all fifty states in the wake of the 2015 U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, superseding the existing patchwork of state legislations (and often state constitutional bans) and effectively changing the civil definition of marriage to encompass same-sex unions.

- b. **Histories:** What is the history of marriage, as an ideal and in practice, in this society and in other societies? Is it true that most things called “marriages” throughout history have consisted of only one man and only one woman? Have most societies viewed marriage as an exclusive, lifelong partnership, between two people, for the raising of children? What sorts of restrictions—by age, race, blood ties, mental ability—have been (or continue to be) placed on those seeking to get married?
- c. **Contemporary Law and Society:** What percentage of people in our society live in a companionate but non-marital relationship? What sorts of tangible benefits—tax exemptions, health insurance, inheritance rights, and so on—are granted to people in state-recognized marriages but not to people in other kinds of relationship?
- d. **Consequences of Change:** What has happened to marriage rates among opposite-sex couples in places where (state-sanctioned) same-sex marriages are allowed? What has happened to divorce rates in those places?

2. *Approach the topic from the perspective of the different families of values.* Each family of values brings some features to the foreground and puts others into the background. The facts that are most relevant, from the perspective of someone holding one set of values, might not seem as relevant from the perspective of someone who is using a different “lens” of values.

Take capital punishment as an example. From a utilitarian point of view, the most relevant factual questions include: how do the violent crime rates in places without capital punishment compare to those with it? How much (in attorneys’ fees, court costs, utilities, medical expenses) does capital punishment cost when compared to alternatives? How many people are actually sentenced to death, and for which crimes? How are executions actually carried out?

A virtue-centered ethics, by contrast, asks questions more like: what percentage of people convicted of serious crimes express remorse and offer to make amends? What psychological effects are reported by officials who conduct executions? What psychological effects are reported by the victims’ loved ones when the criminal is executed—or when the criminal is imprisoned for life?

Likewise, a person-centered ethics might be most interested in how the courts have interpreted and balanced the rights of accused and convicted murderers, and whether sentencing guidelines require (or at least allow) consideration of impairments such as mental retardation, a childhood history of abuse, or psychological disturbances.

From the point of view of an ethics of relationship, finally, a vital question is: are there workable methods of punishment that also help restore community—that speak to the needs and possibilities of everyone involved?

3. *Be wary of “research by opinion poll.”* When I ask my students which facts might be relevant to a given moral issue, often some reply that “what people’s opinions are” is a relevant fact. And, they suggest, we can look for opinion polls or other statistical instruments to see what people’s opinions actually are.

The question of people’s opinions can indeed be approached as a question of fact. Polls (if well-conducted!) will give you some answers. And of course, as we consider whether to change or keep various social structures and institutions, or how to implement changes, it is important to take people’s strongly held feelings and opinions into account. However, the real question is how well people’s opinions are based upon the actual facts of the case. Mere opinion is not the end of the matter—only the beginning.

In other words, the real question is: What *should* we think? What information do people need—in particular, do *we* need—in order to have an *informed* opinion? Asking around, listening to others, and using the different families of moral values to guide your factual inquiries are vital to that outcome. This is a good point at which to reiterate central themes from chapters 1 and 2 of this book: Careful, informed thinking is central to ethical deliberation and action!

SOURCES

To determine the actual facts and to responsibly advance our claims about them on the best authority, we need to find *good sources*. A good source:

1. is *cited fully*, so that it can be found by others;
2. is *well-informed*—that is, as knowledgeable as possible on the subject;
3. is as *impartial* as possible—that is, its prime commitment is to get the facts right, rather than to advance some partisan agenda;
4. *cross-checks*—that is, converges with other informed and impartial sources.

Where you need numeric data, a useful and reliable all-around source is the *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. There are similar volumes for other countries. Crime statistics and automotive fuel economies are all easily accessible public information. You may need to search for books or articles on the topic that concerns you. Library catalogs and online databases have keyword-search systems: using them you can spotlight helpful sources very quickly. Ask for help when you need it. That’s what reference librarians are for!

Look for thorough and careful coverage of the issues in books or journal articles by well-informed people. Check to see who the authors are, and where they get *their* information. What are their qualifications?

Are they relatively impartial? On global climate change, for example, neither oil-industry publications nor environmental magazines are likely to survey all the evidence or draw the most carefully considered conclusions. The best sources are established scientific journals, whose articles are carefully reviewed by other experts and where the norm is supposed to be scrupulous neutrality. (They will mostly tell you that climate change is quite real, though the causes and timetables are less clear.) Books published by academic presses are more reputable (more carefully and critically reviewed) than books from presses that only publish books promoting a specific point of view. You may have to do some background research on publishers to tell which are which.

Cross-check sources, too, to see if other, independent sources agree. Are the experts sharply divided, or pretty much in agreement? If they're pretty much in agreement, theirs is the safe view to take. (At the very least, if you propose to take a different view, you have some serious explaining to do.) Where even the experts disagree, it is best to reserve judgment yourself too. Don't jump in with two feet where truly informed people tread with care. See if you can argue on some other grounds—or change your conclusions.

No question: the majority of qualified authorities can still certainly be wrong. It has happened, and no doubt it will happen again. Still, they are much less likely to be wrong than you or me, much as we might *want* something else to be the case. When 99% of qualified scientists tell us that carbon emissions are a key driver of climate change, for instance, it is time to believe them, unwelcome as the implications might be.

Watch the tone of your sources. Sources that make extreme or simplistic claims, or spend most of their time attacking and demeaning the other side, weaken their own claims. Seek out sources that engage the arguments and evidence on the other side responsibly and thoroughly.

BUILD YOUR WEB SAVVY

Used carefully, the Internet is a great resource—the world at your fingertips. Many sites are very informative—I cite them myself repeatedly in this book. However, other sites are pure fabrication. Maybe I should say that again more emphatically: *some sites are pure fabrication*. The trickier ones are *part* fabrication—just enough to mislead or confuse to distort or sour or manipulate our feelings. Academic libraries and even most public libraries have at least some checks on the reliability and tone of the books and other materials they collect, but there are very few (in fact, usually, there are *absolutely no*) checks on Internet sites. Any site can announce all it wants that it is objective or unbiased, but that hardly makes it so.

Even the flimsiest or most hateful opinion site can dress itself up to look professional. Without a critical eye, then, the Web can seem just a

mass of conflicting viewpoints and claims, leaving you adrift or misled. At first glance, each may seem as valid as the next. Sometimes the results can be lethal. There are hate sites disguised as “information,” and deliberately misleading sites designed to top search engines’ lists and snare unsuspecting and perhaps desperate people looking for the facts: sites on abortion, for example, that look sympathetic and objective but are actually designed to frighten pregnant young women away from even thinking about it. Sometimes these sites are downright lies, other times they merely cherry-pick their facts, which may be true enough, but they also leave aside others, so that they paint a totally false picture without telling an actual lie. There is an art to this, alas. The only way past it is to learn to read more carefully and critically.

Do not rely on the Internet alone then, unless you are dealing with an identifiable and independently reputable source—and don’t rely on a website *at all* unless you have some idea of what its source is. Ask critical questions of any source: Who created this site? Why did they create it? What are their qualifications? What does it mean if they don’t tell you? Again, cross-check sources, look for the most thorough and impartial sources you can, and never stop thinking!

GENERALIZATIONS

We make inferences when we move from specific facts to further conclusions. We may generalize from a few cases to many, or use a similar case to draw conclusions about a case that interests us, or notice the correlation of two events and conclude that one causes the other. Each kind of inference is necessary—and each kind can be tricky. We can start with *generalizations*.

You or I will never know all sweatshop workers, or women in the army, or gay couples, or rich people or poor people, or drug users or businesspeople or environmental activists, and so on and on—yet we may need to draw conclusions about them if we are to form an intelligent opinion about certain moral issues. So we have to *generalize*: we take a small sample—limited data, a few examples—to stand for the whole.

But we may generalize well, or poorly. A good generalization:

1. Rests on *specific* and *clear* examples.
2. Rests on *many* examples.
3. Rests on *representative* examples—that is, not all from one possibly atypical sample—and offers enough *background information* to allow us to evaluate for ourselves how significant and representative the examples are.

We generalize, for example, about the conditions and nature of happiness. What does it take to be happy? There are striking examples of spectacularly rich people who have been spectacularly unhappy. Shall we therefore conclude that money cannot make you happy? (Or even that it makes you unhappy?) People do:

The misery of the rich is legendary. The late oil billionaire J. Paul Getty was notoriously unhappy and lonely for much of his life. Entrepreneur and socialite Howard Hughes became reclusive and paranoid, while multi-millionaire pop star George Michael revealed in a recent documentary how his wealth and fame had never made him happy. . . . The tales of many lottery winners are replete with envy, spite, and family break-up.

So that's it, eh? If you want to be happy, give away your money if you have any, and never, ever enter lotteries. Well, slow down a little. . . . First it might be wise to ask how this argument fares on our criteria.

Requirement 1 asks for specific and clear examples. But the ones offered here are sketchy and anecdotal, almost one-liners. Those cited need more detail and support: citations (how do we find out whether the claims about these billionaires are true?), biographies, careful scientific surveys of lottery winners. None of that is offered here.

Requirement 2 asks for many examples—more than a few, at least if the class being generalized over is large. Here, conclusions are being suggested about all people—a pretty large group! More examples are needed than three rich people and a few lottery winners.

Requirement 3 is the key here, and helps justify requirement 2. Without a range of examples, we have no way of judging whether a few miserable rich people are representative or not. Surely there are *some* people who will be unhappy regardless of how much money they have—just as there are surely some who will be happy regardless. Or maybe something else, quite unrelated to money, leads to unhappiness in their case. The question remains whether *most* richer people tend to be happier. Maybe, maybe not—but a large number of examples, fairly detailed and as representative and varied as possible, rather than a few striking cases, are necessary before we can say anything with confidence.

These warnings and criteria apply to more difficult questions as well. Again we may take climate change for an example. It is certainly true that there are some places where climate change is less marked—including, by some odd quirk of the climate system, the northeastern coast of the United States—and others where it is changing drastically. A few examples of either type support no generalizations. Our view needs to be detailed and global. What is the big picture? How do we understand the overall patterns we are seeing? These questions bring us into statistical explorations and perhaps less dramatic-sounding arguments, but it is there that we begin to see the real answers.

COMPARISONS

Sometimes we make inferences by comparing one kind of situation with another seemingly similar situation about which more is known. A good comparison:

1. Cites as a comparison a *clear* case about which *true* claims are made.
2. Cites as a comparison a *relevantly similar* case. That is, the cases compared must be as similar as possible in ways that matter to the conclusion—though they can be very different in other, less relevant ways.

In the Netherlands, people are allowed to have small amounts of marijuana for personal use and “coffeehouses” sell small amounts openly for use on the premises. The results of this policy are reasonably positive. People therefore argue that legal marijuana should be manageable in America. This is an argument by comparison. Is it a good one?

To meet requirement 1 we need to know more about the Dutch policy and its results. Technically all drugs are illegal there, but in practice only harder drugs are prosecuted. The coffeehouse system is meant to make it difficult to buy large amounts. Documented marijuana use has increased significantly among Dutch young people, but hard drug use has actually declined. Dutch law still prohibits unsafe driving and public nuisances created by any intoxicant, legal or not: rates have not increased. Some political arguments continue—the current policy seems hypocritical to some, and the issue of supply has not been addressed (some argue that the Dutch state should grow its own marijuana so there are legal sources for the coffeehouses!)—but on the whole, it seems fair enough to conclude that the results are indeed “reasonably positive.”

Requirement 2 requires a *relevantly similar* comparison. Can we infer that a social policy that works in the Netherlands will therefore also work in America? How similar are the two?

The Netherlands is a small, densely populated, homogeneous nation, whose people tend to be more socially minded than many Americans. These are major relevant differences. Drug abuse is therefore less likely (in fact, it turns out that the bulk of the customers in the coffeehouses are foreigners, including many American college students) and much harder to hide if it does occur. On the other hand, the Netherlands is a modern, developed, democratic state, like the United States, and it gives its citizens a wide range of freedoms. These are major relevant similarities.

This comparison, then, is only partly successful on the second requirement. It seems likely that the potential for abuse is higher in the United States (at least, the comparison doesn’t persuade me that it isn’t). On the other hand, the Dutch system does suggest that some creative forms of controlled availability could be workable here too as well. We could even take it as

an incentive to do some creative thinking about other possible systems here. To that extent, the comparison is useful and revealing.

INFERRING CAUSE FROM CORRELATION

Happiness may not correlate with money, but it does correlate with things like good health, a loving marriage, and lots of friends. Therefore it might be concluded that good health, a loving marriage, and lots of friends *lead to or cause* happiness. This is an argument from correlation to cause.

A good argument from correlation to cause:

1. Cites *accurate* correlations.
2. *Explains* how the (proposed) cause leads to the (proposed) effect.
3. Argues that the proposed cause-effect relationship is the *best explanation* of the correlation.

To meet requirement 1, you'd need to consult social-scientific research for reliable statistics to show that married people, say, are more likely than unmarried people to report being happy.

The proposed cause-effect connection then needs to be spelled out—that is the point of requirement 2. How marriage is supposed to lead to happiness, psychologically, is pretty clear: having a spouse can be a pleasurable and supportive thing. Filling in such links is crucial: it's what turns a mere cooccurrence into a plausible *connection*.

Requirement 3, however, is still hard to meet. The problem is a general philosophical one: *any correlation can be explained in a variety of ways*.

A and B, let's say, are correlated. It could well be that A causes B. It could *also* be that B causes A (instead, or in addition), or that both A and B have a common cause, or that A and B are not causally related at all.

It is true that a strong correlate of happiness is marriage. The proposed conclusion is that marriage tends to cause happiness. But the evidence only really says that the two tend to occur together. Other conclusions remain possible. It could also be that happy people are better at forming and sustaining marriages—so that happiness leads to marriage, not necessarily vice versa. That is, the connection could be the other way around, and the evidence—the correlation—would be exactly the same!

Or perhaps a certain sort of character—say, cheerful and kind—leads *both* to better marriages *and* to happiness. That is, marriage and happiness may have a common cause, rather than being directly connected.

Yet again, each could affect the other, in a kind of feedback loop. Maybe happy people have better marriages, which in turn make them happier, which in turn. . . . The story might well be complex.

Clearly it makes a big difference which of these stories is true. But it certainly isn't easy to tell which. This is why a good argument about causes

must explain how the proposed cause could lead to the proposed effect (requirement 2 again) *and* must try to show that the proposed explanation is the *best* or most *likely* explanation of the observed correlation—requirement 3.

Many other issues involve similar questions. To return to the drug question, for example, here's another statistic. It turns out that a significant proportion of the homeless are drug users. We might conclude from this that drug use leads to homelessness. It's a plausible inference, and it suggests in turn that to address homelessness we need to crack down on drug use. On the other hand, the very same correlation could equally well suggest that homelessness leads people to use drugs, suggesting that we need to address homelessness directly, in part to reduce drug use. Probably both are true to some extent, but which is the *main* effect is a crucial question for social policy.

Or again, as I mentioned earlier, though a decline in capital punishment in the United States from 1933 to 1969 corresponds to a rise in murders, it's hard to know what to make of this. There have been vast changes in American life in this period. Cities have become crowded, weapons have become readily available, social mores and family life have changed dramatically, as have economic conditions. Any of these factors could explain the rise in murders at least as readily as the decline in executions. And why do states with the death penalty on average have higher murder rates than states that don't? Inferring from correlation to cause here is tricky at best.

READING 23

Selections from “*The Ethical Practice of Critical Thinking*”

MARTIN FOWLER

THIS CHAPTER HAS been arguing that critical thinking—careful use of the criteria for reliable inferences—is a must for ethical engagement. Another key point in this chapter, and in the book as a whole, is that critical thinking, and the attitude and care that go with it, are ethical *in themselves*. They too are modes of taking care for the basic needs and legitimate expectations of others as well as oneself.

Martin Fowler's book *The Ethical Practice of Critical Thinking* (Carolina Academic Press, 2008) connects these two points. Fowler argues that “we improve our reasoning and communities of discourse by taking each other's humanity and dignity as

Martin Fowler, *The Ethical Practice of Critical Thinking*, Carolina Academic Press, 2008, pp. xiv–xv, 9–10, 20–21. Reproduced with permission.

seriously as our arguments.” The best critical thinking, he says, makes “arguments which matter, about things which matter, together with people who matter to each other.” He calls these *sustaining arguments*. In the selection that follows, Fowler paints a fuller picture of sustaining arguments, and then connects that picture explicitly to specific critical practices such as scholarship and curiosity.

Martin Fowler (b. 1951) has taught philosophy at Elon University since 1994. He has been active in jail ministry in Durham, North Carolina, exploring alternatives to mass incarceration as the society’s exclusive response to crime and violence. He teaches courses in restorative justice, “animal captivity,” and philosophy of space exploration. Most recently, he has written about the philosophical meaning of belonging in *You Always Belonged and You Always Will: A Philosophy of Belonging* (2014).

Critical thinking, like any sustained, complex human activity which affects people, does have a rich ethical landscape. That landscape concerns what we can call “sustaining arguments.” . . . If we’re looking for an . . . ethical standard for arguments, we recognize that we need to tend not just to the activity (arguing) but also to the community and its members that make arguing possible. *Sustaining arguments are arguments which matter, about things which matter, to people who matter to each other.*

- Sustaining arguments respect the intelligence and humanity of the both the arguer and intended audience by helping rather than hindering our ability to think, and by supporting rather than undermining a community of discourse. Not all arguers are blessed with intelligence or complete information, and even the brightest debaters can commit fallacies. However, we can do our best with the information and tools available such that an argument can manifest the very best thinking of which we’re capable. Then we can ask: *Does the argument allow people to better understand what they are arguing about? Are they better able to continue thinking about the subject with each other as a result of the argument?* If not, then the argument and the discussion fail to be sustaining, even if it is logically valid and its conclusion is well-supported. . . .
- Sustaining arguments prove something worth discussing, allow decisions worth considering, or lead to commitments worth making. A sustaining argument is never something offered solely “for the sake of argument.” You still might argue hypothetically or playfully, but, if the argument is to really sustain a community’s members, you can’t start arguing from a standpoint of complete detachment, alienation, or self-absorption, and proceed to argue

with indifference to the perspective and background of the audience and the welfare of the community of discourse to which you and your audience belong. A sustaining argument may even be about something exotic, esoteric, technical, or abstract, but its good reasons will also be good for the community's discourse. . . .

- Sustaining arguments are also necessarily good arguments which are factually based and logically coherent. If an argument matters in the ways we've discussed, then it matters enough to be *well-argued*.

You might be skeptical about this statement. After all, since communities of discourse seem to be greatly influenced by very bad arguments which appear in the media, why can't certain bad arguments be considered "sustaining" too, at least for advertisers and politicians? A bad argument may create profit for someone and a certain solidarity of opinion, but a bad argument also disrespects intelligence, hinders people's ability to think, and often is offered to end discourse rather than to sustain or promote it. . . .

How good does an argument need to be? No argument is perfect, and you can uncover some weakness in any argument's logic or have legitimate doubts about the truth of some of its propositions. The point is that the argument's genuine strengths, whatever they are, are necessary for the argument to be sustaining, despite whatever weaknesses it may have. "Sustaining" isn't just a neutral label that can apply equally to good and bad arguments. All sustaining arguments are good, but not all good arguments are sustaining. An argument which embodies the best standards of critical thinking available to the community does more than advance the argument. It also lifts up the community. . . .

[Ethical] principles guide and promote the features of sustaining arguments. [One of the foremost is the] *Principle of Scholarship: Acknowledge and deal with the obstacles to knowledge effectively enough to investigate the truth of propositions, test the strength of inferences, and evaluate the merits of an argument.*

The hard work is figuring out what assertions or claims can be trusted enough to count as facts. Even information you've determined to be reasonably trustworthy and reliable still needs to be interpreted as you think through its logical implications, its relationship to other information you have, and its application to issues which matter. You are then in a better position to decide which pertinent facts are still missing and which facts are still needed. Also, we can expect that, if the argument is about a new or controversial subject, then the facts we need may be hidden or disputed. The principle of scholarship is not a cynical and indiscriminate mistrust of what we hear and see, but a shrewd and diligent set of

disciplines and skills for investigating and assessing all sources of information with an aim of working with a community for the sake of more trustworthy knowledge.

We [also] need a principle of scholarship because, whether we look for facts in our immediate surroundings, or in books, newspapers, or the internet, facts can be suppressed, slanted, deleted, or taken out of context. Again, it's not cynicism to recognize that, even when we don't encounter outright lies and falsehood, information resources which are controlled by one or only a few persons or corporations, or which are offered solely to sell products or services[,] are not likely to be objective or impartial about what they offer. In order for us to be scholars as well as critical thinkers, we need to face such a situation honestly, shrewdly, and imaginatively. We also have to admit that we unconsciously ignore or dismiss unfamiliar facts that don't comfortably fit inside the boundaries of our perspective or conform to our past experience.

While we're being so diligent about sorting, sifting, and scrutinizing what counts as a "fact," scholarship doesn't end there. We're also seeking and judging what counts as a good argument. Unfortunately, extended and well-reasoned arguments do not often appear in the media or in popular print media. More often, we encounter sound bites, retorts, dumbed-down prose, and snippets of news without context. . . . Do you think we have plenty of daily exposure to sustaining or even thoughtful arguments?

Cynicism may creep in again at this point. Should we spurn or suspect any argument offered by someone who is arguing to make money? Isn't that an "ulterior motive"? No, it's not ulterior unless the argument lacks substance for the community in question. Marketing and business majors don't need to renounce their chosen professions as devoid of trustworthy facts or good faith arguments. Whether you argue to buy or sell, you rely quite a bit on the trustworthiness or at least the perceived trustworthiness of your arguments and your own reputation as part of earning a living.

In fact, we learn to apply the principles of charity and scholarship in the media and in business. Whether we're consumers or doing our job, we need to find a representative sample of pertinent perspectives, check for inconsistencies, and collaborate to make full use of our life experiences to test the trustworthiness of what we take to be facts. It's not easy to be discerning about this. Just think of cynicism here as a lazy and indiscriminate rejection of an argument without considering its real merits. Instead, apply the same principle of scholarship and you may find some arguments that are first-rate and can be models to emulate for making new

arguments. In this way, even arguments that don't make money for anyone can nevertheless have a pay-off!

...

How do you apply the principle of scholarship in your own community of discourse? Here are some suggestions:

- Do your homework and learn the facts, but realize that the facts are not necessarily pre-identified and pre-verified for your convenience. Be aware that your own perspective may blind or bias you as to which facts you manage to notice or even which experiences you're willing to regard as facts. Be open-minded as well as diligent.
- Get to know each other's backgrounds in your community of discourse. Whenever you do scholarship, you're not only learning, but you're teaching others. Being a good scholar means taking responsibility not just for what you learn but for how you can best share that knowledge with others.
- Remember that there is more than one way to do scholarship. Although much of scholarship is discovering and testing facts, scholarship is also about pulling facts together into new and meaningful patterns as you discover how facts relate to each other. Scholarship happens as you apply what you learn to daily life or teach others. Sometimes scholarship is "research" in the academic sense. At other times, it looks more like networking, brainstorming, and getting the big picture.
- A key skill for critical thinking . . . is *curiosity*. Curiosity is not just an unsatisfied desire for particular information. That sort of frustration may lead us to give up on seeking the unavailable information. However, the disappointment or failure to know something becomes true curiosity when you nurture and act upon your thirst, craving, or desire to learn or know things, particularly by successfully overcoming obstacles to finding out. . . . For example, if you join a team of other engineers to figure out why a space shuttle exploded, would you want a team, no matter how smart, without curiosity? A curious person spots situations which do not make sense and doesn't tolerate them *not* making sense. . . .

MORE PITFALLS

Careful and critical thinking is an art—a kind of skill that has many aspects, that takes time, that can always be learned better. This section concludes chapter 9 by briefly outlining and explaining still more critical reminders in

ethics: pointing out some other “fallacies” or pitfalls that can bedevil ethical (and other) thinking. More items for your watch-list!

First, here are two seeming short-cuts to moral arguments—familiar moves, in fact—that in truth are more like *short-circuits*: more ways in which the real work of thinking does not get done.

MERE QUOTATION IN PLACE OF ARGUMENT

A source like a religious leader or text or a moral philosopher can be quoted as authoritative when they speak for the whole moral tradition. There are times when that is appropriate. You could even quote this very book—you’re very welcome—at least on the basics: for example, that ethics enjoins us to take care for the basic needs and legitimate expectations of others as well as ourselves.

However, those occasions are mostly ceremonial, and the applicable quotations are mostly very general, like the one from this book. That is because on contentious moral matters there is—by definition—disagreement. And you know from this chapter that when authorities disagree about the facts, it is necessary to be very modest with your own claims, to reserve judgment when you can, and in any case that you have to argue for whatever claims you do make, rather than simply citing someone, even if well-informed and reasonably impartial, on your favorite side of the controversy.

The same holds when your claim is specifically moral. When authorities disagree about moral values or their application, it’s best to be very modest with your own claims, even to reserve judgment when you can, and in any case you have to argue for whatever claims you do make rather than simply citing someone, even if a perfectly reasonable authority, on your favorite side of the controversy. Argument is necessary.

So make your case. Give the best reasons you can for your view, while acknowledging that reliable moral authorities differ on the subject. If you wish, you can quote someone with whom you agree to help *state* your case, but the mere fact of their agreement or quotability does not *make* your case.

APPEAL TO TRADITION IN PLACE OF ARGUMENT

Traditional moral attitudes and practices sometimes seem as if they must be right because they are so warm and familiar. It’s hard to believe that any practice that *feels* so right could actually be wrong—or to face the fact that, even unknowingly, we could be participating in something wrong.

By itself, though, the fact that people have done something for a very long time does not prove that it is right. What feels warm and comfortable to some people can be truly awful for others. There are traditional practices that we view today with horror, wondering how people in the past could have been so morally blind: to even the most extreme forms of racism and sexism,

for example, which were simply taken for granted, and for centuries. Animal-rights advocates sometimes wonder whether our treatment of other animals will not seem equally unbelievable to future generations. As we noted in the “Moral Blind Spots?” question in Exercise 1.2 in this book, this is equally true in more specific cases, like the refusal of morphine to generations of people dying in pain that could have easily been relieved.

It is also possible that some traditional practices were morally defensible in the past but no longer are defensible today because circumstances have changed. After all, there are, or at least were, reasons we have the traditions we do. Eating meat is probably a good example. Once it might have been a necessity, but today many alternatives are available—so it might be argued—and we have the capacity to invent even better ones.

We shouldn’t simply disregard tradition. Again, most traditions aren’t baseless—though sometimes their bases may be quite different than we think, or no longer applicable. Again too, many traditions are harmless or even good. The point is simply that tradition by itself is not an *argument*. Ethics has a more critical edge: it asks us to be more consistently probing, more aware, more responsive . . . and therefore also open to change, even when it may be difficult or poignant.

Next we consider four fallacies or pitfalls that can occur within ethical arguments.

FALSE DILEMMA

Two alternatives, usually sharply opposed, are pictured as the only options, by an argument that goes on to embrace one because obviously the other is implausible or unconscionable, as it well might be. The problem, of course, is that there are very likely more alternatives than two, and not necessarily so thoroughly at odds.

Either we accept the fetus as a human being with as much right to life as any of the rest of us, or we treat it as no more than a piece of matter, like a tumor that can be excised for any reason or even no reason at all. It’s that simple. So unless we ban abortion entirely, we might as well have abortion on demand.

In truth, it’s *not* simple. There are other possibilities too. We could respect the life of the fetus for all kinds of reasons, for example, full human being or not. Think of how expectant parents often feel about their child-to-be, even when it is not even yet a fetus. Some women who nonetheless choose abortion may feel the same, which is why the choice can sometimes be so very difficult—but still possible, for other reasons. There could also be partial (in-between) moral status for the fetus, or we might consider that a developing fetus acquires increasing moral weight as it grows.

These complexities do not mean that you cannot end up with a strong moral position about abortion. They *do* mean that any such position must be arrived at through careful and complex thinking. And meantime the possibility of other, more complex, and perhaps more appealing answers also opens up.

SLIPPERY SLOPE

So-called slippery slope arguments hold that unless we hold a firm and usually fairly extreme moral position, we will inexorably slide into the other moral extreme, which is presented as (and might well be) unremittingly bad. Therefore, the argument concludes, we must “hold the line.”

Case in point: It is sometimes argued that honoring patients’ requests for assisted suicide, even if they are in great pain or close to death already, will inevitably erode respect for life generally, and we’ll end up with doctors or others empowered to make life-or-death decisions irrespective of their patients’ wishes. Analogously, it is often argued that any kind of gun control will inevitably erode the right to bear arms. Gun rights proponents have therefore been willing to defend gun rights even when they acknowledge that criminals or terrorists therefore also may readily get weapons.

There can genuinely be slippery slopes. Sometimes there are moral lines well established in practice and in law, and crossing those lines can have unpredictable consequences. But that it would indeed likely have bad consequences—or good ones, for that matter—in any given case must be shown by *argument*, not just a blanket assertion. Have doctors’ powers soared in states and countries where assisted suicide is currently allowed? (Actually, no.) Have other countries moved step-by-small-step from minimal to maximal restrictions on guns once the first serious controls were put in place? (Yes, sometimes . . . but all countries, including the United States, already have many restrictions in place, without necessarily adding more, so it does not appear to be inevitable, either—for better or worse.) Again, mind the evidence!

LOADED LANGUAGE

Loaded language is language that evokes strong feelings (or perhaps subtly tinged feelings) that more or less pre-determine an answer, rather than carefully describing a problem or situation, as objectively as possible, before trying to resolve it. When a moral position is already “loaded” into the very description of a situation, there is no space for careful and critical thinking to work.

Even such a classic essayist as Henry David Thoreau is not above loaded language.

No humane being, past the thoughtless age of boyhood, will wantonly murder any creature which holds its life by the same tenure that he does (*Walden and Civil Disobedience*, p. 260.)

Thoreau intends this as an argument against hunting and the mistreatment of other animals: it is an appeal to sympathy with them, recognizing our shared vulnerability to death. But terms like “thoughtless” and “wanton murder” harden the argument into a condemnation that is more appropriate for a somewhat melancholy (or in-your-face) bumper sticker.

Sometimes loaded language is meant to be manipulative. Other times we may do it to ourselves: drawing on clichés, for example, to do our thinking for us. Shopworn terms, familiar ruts. You can also see that loaded language is not a “sustaining” style of thinking and arguing. Those who have different views or values from those of the speaker/writer are typically pushed away, demeaned, even demonized. Even a few inflammatory terms may be enough: “tree-hugger” or “Bambi-lovers” for environmentalists, say; some version of “rapist” for timber or mineral corporations. “Terrorist” gets thrown around by all sides. Moral terms can be positively loaded too—Thoreau’s appeal to “humane beings” for example—but usually it doesn’t have quite the charge of the negative ones.

Other times the loaded language is a gross simplification. Just try going somewhere and “demanding” an abortion, for example. There may well be good reasons to morally object to allowing abortion as an elective option for women seeking to end their pregnancies, but again, the argument needs to state and develop them, not try to condemn abortion by mere rhetorical trope.

TENDENTIOUS DEFINITION

The point of a definition is to help us understand the key features of the thing being defined and to be able to distinguish it from other things. (When is it “cheating” to ask for help writing an academic paper? What is “assisted suicide” and how does it differ from other forms of suicide [or assistance]? And what is a “drug,” anyway?) A tendentious definition may be unfair, loaded, or just too offhandedly conceived to serve these purposes.

We may look to a definition of “drug,” for example, for guidance about what sorts of substances we should use or avoid and what should be legally allowed or banned. But defining such terms is a tricky business. Strong moral judgments may enter right away and trip us up over our own feet. For example, it might be tempting to define a drug as “an illegal substance,” as even so august a body as a Presidential Commission once did. Such a definition is useless, however, to help us decide whether any given substance *should* be illegal. Besides, this (attempt at a) definition is too broad. There are many illegal substances that are not drugs: for instance, some toxic chemicals.

We also speak of “drugs” in the sense of pharmaceuticals, many of which are not morally troubling at all (aspirin, vitamins) while others are legally controlled but, with a prescription, not morally troubling either. Moreover, some kinds of marijuana are now shifting from moralized kinds of substances

(for some people, and pro or con) to pharmaceutical. Like I said, definition is a tricky business!

Try to be factual: don't use loaded language in a definition. Abortion is not to be *defined* as "murdering babies," for example—that would be for an argument to show. Let the moral judgments come later, once your definition has clarified what you are talking about. And be precise. Don't just replace the problematic word with a synonym—it will be just as confused as the original word. Get technical if you have to. Keep the dictionary handy—sometimes it is a model of precision and impartiality.

Technically, your job is to formulate a definition that includes all the things that the term being defined clearly fits, excludes all the things that the term clearly does not fit, and draws a plain and plausible line in between. For "drug," in the moral sense, try this:

A drug is a substance used primarily to alter the state of the mind in some specific way.

This definition is neutral about whether or when altering one's state of mind is a morally good thing or not. Its aim is simply to clarify what we are talking about. Notice also that, along the way, the very attempt to give a logical and neutral definition also raises some unexpected questions. Antidepressants and stimulants also are used primarily to alter our states of the mind in some specific way, and for that matter so are alcohol and even coffee. Are they drugs too? If so, what follows?

QUICK REFERENCE: CRITICAL-THINKING BASICS

WHEN FACTS ARE AT ISSUE

- Clarify *what* facts are at issue.
- Do your research.
- Seek out the best sources.

A GOOD SOURCE:

1. is *cited fully*, so that it can be found by others;
2. is *well-informed*—that is, as knowledgeable as possible on the subject;
3. is as *impartial* as possible—that is, its prime commitment is to get the facts right, rather than to advance some partisan agenda;
4. *cross-checks*—that is, converges with other informed and impartial sources.

WHEN INFERENCES ARE AT ISSUE

A good *generalization*:

1. Cites *specific* and *clear* examples.
2. Cites *many* examples.
3. Cites *representative* examples and gives enough *background information* to allow us to evaluate for ourselves how significant and representative the examples are.

A good *comparison*:

1. Cites as a comparison a *clear* case about which *true* claims are made.
2. Cites as a comparison a *relevantly similar* case.

A good *argument from correlation to cause*:

1. Cites *accurate* correlations.
2. *Explains* how the (proposed) cause leads to the (proposed) effect.
3. Argues that the proposed cause-effect relationship is the *best explanation* of the correlation.



FOR REVIEW

1. Pick a moral debate and give an example of a specific fact that could help resolve it.
2. What four requirements must be met by a reliable source for such a fact?
3. Why cross-check sources—and how?
4. Pick a moral debate and give an example of a factual generalization that is relevant to it.
5. What three requirements must a reliable generalization meet?
6. Pick a moral debate and give an example of a factual comparison that is relevant to it.
7. What two requirements must such a comparison meet?
8. Pick a moral debate and give an example of a cause-and-effect inference that is relevant to it.
9. What three requirements must such a cause-and-effect inference meet?
10. What is a “sustaining argument,” according to Martin Fowler? Why are sustaining arguments so important?

11. Review the weaknesses of the appeal to tradition in ethics.
12. What does the text identify as other pitfalls to be sure to avoid in our ethical thinking?



FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

9.1 IDENTIFYING FACTS AT ISSUE

Identify at least three factual questions that are central to the following ethical debates as you understand them. That is, ask what sorts of factual claims tend to be made, or presupposed, in this debate? What facts could we find out, through the appropriate kinds of research, that would make a difference? Be specific!

- Should all legal restrictions on using marijuana be removed?
- Should you stop eating meat?
- Should we prefer “cultured” or “synthetic meat” over regular meat?
- Should adoption files be opened so that people separated by at-birth adoptions can later find each other?
- How seriously should colleges and universities take plagiarism?
- Are we morally obliged to use only renewable, non-polluting energy sources?
- Should a parent be encouraged or expected to stay home with preschool children?
- Should health care be considered a human right rather than a market commodity?
- Does the threat of terrorist attack justify intrusive airport searches and increasing government surveillance?
- Should genetic engineering be banned?

Add your own favorite issues as well.

Please note: The question is not what is your own answer or conclusion about any of these questions. It is not even what the facts actually are—that comes at the next stages. The first question is just what facts are *relevant* or *necessary* to making progress on the issue. If you bring strong views on the question into this exercise, you may need to deliberately and explicitly put them to the side for a time. It may help to work with someone with whom you differ on the issue. How much of your disagreement comes to disagreement over the facts? What facts?

Take your time with these. Part of the lesson is that we are often far too hasty in thinking through the factual basis of our moral views. Too often we don't ask questions at all! Of course, don't multiply questions endlessly, either—at a certain point that too becomes less than serious—but take each issue carefully and give it some time. A good procedure might be to brainstorm as many questions as arise in, say, ten minutes, and then take another ten minutes to use your initial list of questions to formulate three really good ones. Then repeat for the next issue.

9.2 PURSUING THE FACTS

In Exercise 9.1 you identified three factual questions that are central to each of a number of contemporary ethical debates. The next step is to consider how you could begin to resolve these factual questions. What sources can you find? For what questions can you find reliable and reasonably objective information on the Web? Where? Will answering some of these questions require inferences? What sorts of inferences (generalization, comparison, reasoning from correlation to cause, others?) might you have to use? Which is likely to be the most successful?

Again to be very clear: The challenge is *not* to construct an argument for your favored conclusion about the whole issue. The challenge here is much more specific (and more patient!): it is simply to consider what kinds of exploration or research it would take to resolve (or, anyway, advance) the particular factual issue you've identified. You don't even have to do the actual research: just consider carefully how you *could*.

Vegetarianism, for example. You might have said that one central factual question in this debate is how readily people can live without meat. Is a vegetarian diet healthy? If this is your question, a way to find out is to consult nutritionists or nutrition textbooks. (While you're at it, you could also ask: is a *meat* diet healthy? And: what sort of diet is *healthiest*?) There may be some disagreement, but with some persistence you still should be able to find a reasonably well-informed and neutral answer.

Of course this is not the same as answering the whole question. Suppose you find out that a vegetarian diet can be as healthy as or healthier than a meat diet. It would not necessarily follow that you must become a vegetarian. After all, there are other relevant values besides health. The point here is simply to ask how we might resolve the specific factual questions you've identified—not how we might resolve the whole issue. One thing at a time!

9.3 TAKE UP SOME ISSUES IN DETAIL

In Exercise 9.1 you identified three factual questions that are central to each of a number of contemporary ethical debates. In Exercise 9.2 you considered what kind of research or sources it would take to answer those questions.

Now, choose a few of those questions and actually do the work: go out and answer the questions you identified as central to some of those debates, using the methods you identified as the best. Go into them in depth.

This would make a good research paper: take a very controversial moral issue and simply research its factual basis critically and open-mindedly. Make your moral conclusions secondary, if you draw any at all.

9.4 THE WELFARE ISSUE AS A CASE IN POINT

The contemporary American debate about welfare, very roughly, is over whether tax money should be used for monetary support for people who are economically down and out, for help with housing and food costs, and aid to poor parents with dependent children. (Charitable support may also be a form of “welfare,” but it is less morally controversial because the funding normally is voluntary.) It can be an intensely emotional debate, on all sides, and also, not coincidentally, is shaped by many second- or third-hand beliefs. You can do better, using the critical skills you are developing in this chapter.

Start with definitions. What *is* welfare? Most people in national polls oppose something called “welfare,” but when asked whether they favor most of the individual federal and state programs that make it up, they overwhelmingly say yes. Opponents reduce it, sometimes, to just one or two out of the current several dozen major social-support programs, especially food stamps, or the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. Among others are Unemployment Compensation, Medicaid, Supplemental Social Security for the disabled and elderly poor, housing assistance, and infant supply and nutrition programs, which are all “means-tested” (i.e., to receive benefits a person must demonstrate a certain level of financial and other need), as well as entitlement programs that are not means-tested, like the more familiar kind of Social Security, military and civil service retirement funds, Veterans Administration medical care, Low-Income Home Energy Assistance programs, student loan programs (yup, you may well be on “welfare” too), and still others.

So how would *you* define “welfare”? Or rather, how *should* we define it? What is the most useful way to understand that term? What is the most useful way to understand the “welfare” programs that now exist? What do we actually need to argue about?

Now get some facts. How much money are we talking about here? For which programs? How are expenditures changing? (Increasing? Faster than cost of living?) How do they compare with expenditures for other things (energy programs, education, highways . . .)? Some critics argue that special corporate tax breaks (“corporate welfare,” they call it) cost far more money than all means-tested welfare programs put together. Are they right? How do the numbers look? (And what particular breaks do they have in mind? How are they defining “welfare” to be able to make this claim? Is it a reasonable definition?)

Welfare programs change constantly. Therefore, you will also need to be sure you have the most current information. How have welfare laws and provisions changed recently? And what is their history? You might even make a helpful contribution just by impartially exploring and reporting to your classmates the history of “welfare” programs, starting way back in the ancient world. Welfare programs have changed substantially as they came under the purview of states in recent times, but some form of collective and not-always-voluntary provision for the down and out, though not always generous and frequently highly intrusive, has been a feature of almost all organized societies.

Who’s *on* welfare—on, for starters, the most debated means-tested type? (Look for reliable data here: this especially is a minefield of stereotypes, many of them distorted.) *Why* are people on welfare? How long do they tend to stay? (Once again, be very careful of the stereotypes here—do your research, find the best sources, and talk to people to really find out.) How do poverty and homelessness correlate to violence against women? To veteran status? To the impoverishment of central cities?

Look at welfare programs in your city or region. What social-support programs are available, and to whom, in your area? When cash is involved, how much is paid? Does the amount of aid really make life livable? (That is, how does it relate to the local cost of living? For that matter, how does it relate to *your* cost of living?) Do benefits increase with the recipients’ number of children? If so, find out how much more money a parent gets per month for a second, third, or fourth child. How does it compare with the additional monthly costs of diapers, baby food, medical care, and so on?

Also, how do you get *disqualified*? When and under what conditions does welfare end? How long do people tend to stay on it? How long *can* they? Again, look for the most up-to-date and reliable information. Local social-service workers, administrators of soup kitchens and shelters for the homeless, and human-services departments at your school should be good sources of information. For current U.S. government data, try www.census.gov/hhes/www/poverty.

And finally, hardest and most important: talk to poor people themselves. If you yourself have first-hand knowledge of poverty, speak up! If you don’t, you might want to find out more before being confident of any opinion (regardless of what that opinion is). If you can help out while learning besides, all the better. And should you be talking to other people (i.e., people not on “welfare”) as well? Who?

I hope you see that even these quick questions both invite you to look more deeply into a variety of factual questions—there is real information, not just opinion, about most of these issues—and open up some unexpected ways of thinking and even possible creative solutions (a point to which chapters 13 and 14 return). Again, for purposes of this exercise, it is best to avoid making your results into an argument for one position or another on the whole welfare question. Just concentrate on the facts for now.

NOTES

Fact-finding, inference, and definition are enormous topics. Even brief guide-books can run to hundreds of pages, and there is a wide range of texts and courses available in “informal logic” and persuasion, rhetoric, and argumentative writing. Try Lewis Vaughn’s *The Power of Critical Thinking* (Oxford, many editions). A well-presented classical approach is David Kelley’s *The Art of Reasoning* (Norton, many editions). A very brief introduction is my own book, *A Rulebook for Arguments* (Hackett Publishing Company, many editions)—a fine little book indeed, if I may say so myself (note that I am certainly well-informed on the subject, but not exactly unbiased!). *Rulebook* now exists in a textbook-scale treatment as well: see David Morrow and Anthony Weston, *A Workbook for Arguments: A Complete Course in Critical Thinking* (Hackett Publishing Company, second edition, 2016).

Information on high-performance hybrid cars comes from Antony Ingram, “261 MPG Volkswagen XL1 Production Confirmed, Debuts Geneva,” *Green Car Reports*, February 21, 2013. On the PAC-Car II, see the entry under “Travel and Transport,” guinnessworldrecords.com, accessed 6/28/15.

For an introduction to reasoning about causes, see the Vaughn book just cited or other critical-thinking texts. More difficult but also richly rewarding and provocative is Richard Nisbet and Lee Ross, *Human Inference: Strategies and Shortcomings of Social Judgment* (Prentice-Hall, 1980). Correlations among intimacy, health, and happiness are cited from Dayana Yochim, “Money = Happiness,” <http://www.fool.com/news/commentary/2004/commentary040120dy.htm>, accessed 10/23/06.

“Henry David Thoreau is cited from his *Walden and Civil Disobedience* (Penguin, 1983), p. 260.”

Colin McGinn’s *Moral Literacy* (Hackett/Duckworth, 1992) offers a vigorous and provocative discussion of drugs, beginning with a proposed definition: see his chapter 6. The quote about alcohol at the end of the last section comes from Mike Martin, *Everyday Morality* (Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1995), p. 149.

In previous editions of this book I have only touched lightly on the issue of climate change, in order to keep the so-called “controversy” from eclipsing the main points for some readers. Today, however, with climate change denial increasingly empowered, I no longer think this is a responsible move. Ethics itself requires that such well-established facts be insisted upon, and denial named for what it is, especially when the stakes are immense both for us and for future generations and the whole living Earth.

Far worse is when the deniers also contrive to make it impossible, or much more difficult, to know what is actually happening with the climate—even to find out if they themselves are right. Climate change “skeptics” in Congress and some state legislatures are defunding all scientific research even indirectly related to climate change, and in some cases even banning the use of the term

itself. These are spectacularly irresponsible actions—whatever the truth—and beyond the point where civil and justifiable disagreement can occur or where a textbook ought to stay neutral or mum. On the contrary, on my view, it is an intellectual as well as a moral obligation to call them out. Gathering, safeguarding, and attending to such data, whatever our pre-existing convictions, is essential, especially when the stakes could hardly be higher.

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Judging Like Cases Alike

Kant argues that it is the essence of a moral judgment to generalize to other cases. For my act or decision or position to be moral, it must be one that I would accept and support anyone else holding in similar cases—and one that I hold myself in similar cases. The underlying general principle is virtually a matter of pure logic: like cases should be treated alike.

In practice, though, we often make judgments about one kind of case without thinking a great deal—or thinking at all—about what our judgments imply for similar kinds of cases not before us right now. If we did think about those other cases, though, we might end up thinking differently about the one before us. This too is our responsibility. There *are* implications for similar kinds of cases, and like cases must be judged alike. The upshot is that we are called to a distinctively demanding but also quite fascinating kind of ethical thinking.

CONSISTENCY IS A CHALLENGE

Suppose I am prepared to misrepresent my car in order to sell it. It's expected, I say. Besides, the buyer can get the car checked herself. The moral question is, would I consider it equally justified for someone else to misrepresent *their* car in the same way and for the same reasons in order to sell it (say, just perchance, to *me*)? If not, then I am not judging like cases alike. As Kant would put it, I really am just “making an exception for myself”—treating others as mere means to my ends, acting like somehow I am fundamentally different from them.

In the same spirit, the psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg—you'll remember him from our brief discussion in chapter 8—spoke of “moral musical chairs.” If I judge a moral situation one way from the position we occupy in it, I need to be willing to judge it the same way from the other positions too—say, in particular, from a position in which I am *disadvantaged*. “Moral musical chairs” is an imaginative method, then: a way of considering each of the different people affected and looking at the situation from their points of view. Sit in their chair for a while. We could also call it “role reversal.” A true moral act must be judgeable the same way from every position or role.

Would I consider it equally justified if someone else did the same thing to me? Sometimes the honest answer *could* be “yes.” After all—back to the car—maybe I too would recognize that misrepresentation is expected, and of course it’s true that I *could* get the car checked myself. In that case I do judge like cases alike, and I have done my ethical homework (or some of it, though there may be other moral objections to misrepresenting cars). But this is probably not the norm. Normally we either don’t think about it at all or would judge other people quite differently than ourselves. In that case, we have some ethical work yet to do.

“EXECUTION STOPS A BEATING HEART”

You may have seen a bumpersticker that says EXECUTION STOPS A BEATING HEART. What does this mean?

Literally, it’s just a simple true statement. Execution—capital punishment—stops a beating heart. Since stopping a beating heart—that is, killing someone—is usually a bad thing, it’s a fair guess the person who put on this bumpersticker is opposed to the death penalty. But there is more going on than this.

This bumpersticker suggests an *argument*—in fact, a specific challenge. It’s an ironic response to the anti-abortion bumpersticker, ABORTION STOPS A BEATING HEART. Essentially it suggests that, if you are opposed to abortion on the grounds that it’s an act of killing, then you also ought to be opposed to the death penalty too, since it too is an act of killing. Many people who are pro-life on the abortion issue, however, tend to favor the death penalty. The question is: how can this be a consistent position? The implication is: perhaps you ought to reexamine your reasons for opposing abortion—or for favoring the death penalty.

This is a challenge to “judge like cases alike.” It might be met in various ways, as we will see in a few pages. The first point, however, is that it must be met somehow. You may even have to rethink your views!

Note that the challenge arises the other way around too. Many people who oppose the death penalty tend to be *pro-choice* on the abortion issue. But if “stopping a beating heart” is an objection to execution, why isn’t it an objection to abortion?

RESPECTING INNOCENT LIFE

Here is another example—a related bumpersticker.

WE BRAKE FOR ANIMALS. WE SAVE THE WHALES AND THE BABY SEALS. WHY DO WE STILL TOLERATE ABORTION?
--

Good question. Once again to spell out the suggested argument: one common case for legal abortion rests on the claim that fetal human life is less important not only than nonfetal (born) human life but also less important than many other human needs, for example, the need to have a manageable family size or a chance at a career. But people who accept the case for legal abortion also often are committed to saving the whales, protecting animals, and so on. And that commitment seems to come from a very different place: from an unwillingness to subordinate other lives to human needs, at least needs such as fur coats, meat, and new drugs or household chemicals that won't harm us.

In one case innocent life seems to be a prime value; in the other it does not. How can these two commitments be consistent? Doesn't something have to give somewhere?

Nobody gets off easy here, though—this challenge too works in reverse. People who *oppose* abortion but *tolerate* the mistreatment of animals must

RATIONALIZATION ALERT!

Challenges to “judge like cases alike” can be irritating, downright annoying in fact. It's no fun having our consistency challenged, and it takes work to figure out just what the relevant distinctions are. And of course there's always the danger that we will not be able to find a relevant difference, so that we may even be required to change our minds!

The temptation is to dismiss the challenge—to brush it off as irrelevant or invent some excuse off the top of our heads for treating two apparently like cases in different ways—a form of rationalization, or what chapter 2 calls “offhand self-justification.”

Don't do it. An honest and careful attempt to meet the challenge of consistency—acknowledging that it *is* a real challenge, and that it must be met—is what critical thinking in ethics is all about. Moral principles *are* general in nature. They do apply to other cases besides those that may be in the front of our minds. And if our reasons really are the reasons we are giving, we must be prepared either to draw similar conclusions about those other cases or to change our conclusions in the first case. As Kant emphasizes, this is what it means to live as one among equal others.

You're not obliged to change your mind instantly. It may not even be clear how to answer some of these challenges. The main thing is to keep thinking about the issues. Come back to them when you can. Raise them with others who share (and maybe others who don't share) your judgments of the cases in question. (And don't assume that *they're* so consistent either.) Some philosophers say that it's a lifelong task to work out a set of practical reasons that really do consistently apply to all “like cases.” Any such reasons are going to be in constant flux as new cases come along and as we grow and learn. And that's probably a good thing too.

also consider how their commitments might be consistent. Once again, in the one case innocent life seems to be a prime value; in the other it does not. I once had a neighbor whose truck was plastered with pro-life slogans but who was also an avid deer hunter “for fun,” as he put it. It didn’t sound too “pro-life” to me. At the very least, he had some explaining to do.

ACHIEVING CONSISTENCY

Suppose someone argues that your judgment about one case is not consistent with your judgment about another seemingly “like case.” There are three possible ways in which you might respond.

- You can argue that the alleged “like cases” are not really alike. In that case you need to figure out the *morally relevant difference* between the cases and explain what difference that difference makes.
- You can change your judgment about the “like case” or cases.
- You can change your judgment about the original case or cases.

In short, you can either try to show that your judgments aren’t inconsistent or change one of them.

Take again the question of abortion and capital punishment raised by the EXECUTION STOPS A BEATING HEART bumpersticker. Suppose you oppose abortion but favor capital punishment. Consider your options:

- You could try to establish a difference between the two cases and explain what difference it makes. For example, a natural response is to argue that fetuses are “innocent” but murderers are not. And innocence makes a difference because the innocent have a right to all the protection we can afford as a society. Those who have murdered, however, may forfeit the right to that protection (or some of it, anyway: they still have a right to a fair trial and humane treatment in prison). Those who murder may forfeit their own right to life, a right which all the rest of us, including fetuses on the pro-life view, still have.

Of course, this response might be debated in turn. Many people believe that it may be acceptable to kill innocents in wartime, for example. Others argue that even those who are not “innocent” still have a right to life. So there are further cases to consider. Still, probably some distinction can be maintained. Maybe the two alleged “like cases” are fairly far apart in the end.

- You could decide that, all things considered, you should change your mind and oppose capital punishment too. This is an argument made by some modern Catholic moralists who argue for a “consistent ethic of life”: that if we are to be “pro-life” on some issues we need to be “pro-life” across the board.

- You could decide that, all things considered, you should change your mind and become pro-choice about abortion. The comparison of cases might show you that, in your mind, life is actually not the only or the most important value. You might conclude that your pro-life views about abortion do not reflect your most considered thinking.

There is no automatic way to decide which way to go. Trying to make the most sense of our many moral beliefs and commitments is an ongoing and hard job! You may want to try out all of the possibilities before deciding, and take some time too. Again, though, going in one of these three directions is ultimately necessary. There's nowhere else to go.

MORE EXAMPLES

We've already noted that the abortion/death penalty challenge also holds the other way around. Many people who oppose the death penalty tend to be pro-choice on the abortion issue. But, again, if "stopping a beating heart" is an objection to execution, why isn't it an objection to abortion?

Can *this* challenge be met? Logically there are the same three options. Perhaps pro-choice people would argue that the cases are not truly "like." Many would argue that fetuses are not fully human beings, for example—while murderers *are* fully human beings (though maybe bad ones). Or: some might conclude that capital punishment is morally acceptable too. Or: some might decide that they really ought to become pro-life on the abortion issue.

Again, there is no automatic way to decide—but thinking the question through is essential.

Another bumpersticker, remember, asks how some people can reconcile great concern for other animals with a seeming lack of concern for human fetuses, which also have a kind of life and awareness but are at risk if abortion is legal. How can there be "animal rights," say, and not fetal rights?

Once again, there may be answers. Maybe there is a relevant distinction between the two cases. Maybe it's that other animals are actually born, unlike a fetus (in fact, most animals used for food or testing are full-grown adults) and are conscious of what is happening. Or maybe you'll want to say that abortion is *not* justified when the reasons are mainly utilitarian—if solely for reasons of cost, for example—just as you might also hold that it's no excuse for testing drugs on animals merely that other forms of testing would be more expensive.

This challenge too (like most, you may be noticing) also works the other way around. Can there be fetal rights but not animal rights? If you're pro-life but not a vegetarian, I leave that question for you.

THE GOLDEN RULE

As chapter 3 noted, the “Golden Rule” is a very old idea. Three thousand years ago, Torah was already exhorting the Jewish people not to oppress the foreigner, “for well you know how it feels . . . since you were foreigners yourselves in the land of Egypt” (Exodus 23:9). Buddha said: “As it is the same thing that is dear to you as to others, hurt not others with what pains yourself” (*Dhammapada*, Northern Canon, 5:18). Confucius: “Don’t do to others what you don’t want them to do to you” (*Analects* 15:23). Rabbi Hillel: “What is hateful to yourself, don’t do to another.” Jesus gave it our most familiar positive expression: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you (Luke 6:31, NIV).

Perhaps you have been wondering whether and where the Golden Rule fits among the values and tools we have been exploring. The answer is: right here. The Golden Rule is also, philosopher Harry Gensler argues, “properly understood [as] a consistency principle”—a way of leveraging ourselves into judging like cases alike.

The golden rule is best interpreted as saying: “Treat others only as you consent to being treated in the same situation.” To apply it, you’d imagine yourself on the receiving end of the action in the exact place of the other person (which includes having the other person’s likes and dislikes). If you act in a given way toward another, and yet are unwilling to be treated that way in the same circumstances, then you violate the rule.

Likewise, the 20th-century philosopher C. I. Lewis framed the Golden Rule explicitly in terms of role reversal:

Suppose that there are three people involved in the situation: A, B, and C. Then nothing can be, for you, the right thing to do unless it should still be acceptable to you whether you stand in the place of A, B, or C.

Don’t do to others what you don’t want them to do to you—indeed.

You’d probably expect Kant to agree. The Golden Rule’s demand for consistency seems a natural fit with his insistence that all moral action fit universalizable maxims—that we not “make exceptions for ourselves.” Kant himself, however, had serious objections to the Golden Rule, objections so widely taken up by philosophers since Kant that the Golden Rule has been given a much smaller place in philosophical ethics than you might expect.

Broadly, Kant’s objection was that the Golden Rule, at least in its standard formulation, makes moral conclusions dependent upon variable wishes for oneself. What’s moral to do to others depends on what you are willing to have done to yourself in the same situation. But surely this can vary, or can be determined by arbitrary and variable personal factors. If I don’t like

asparagus, then is it immoral according to the Golden Rule to serve asparagus to anyone else, since I would not want it served to *me*? More seriously, someone who does not mind a great deal of pain (or even desires it) might be quite willing to have pain imposed upon himself or herself, and therefore could consistently impose it on others.

This may not be a decisive objection, though—at least, not yet. For one thing, as with any realistic moral rule, we need to apply the Golden Rule with care to different situations, not mechanically or literally. If I were in my dinner guests' place, for example, I would surely want to be served food *they* like, for instance, asparagus or not.

On the other hand, there are limits to this. The Golden Rule is not designed to be applied by sadomasochists, for example—or, to put it another way, what's troubling about sadomasochism is not something that the Golden Rule should be expected to fix. We might need to limit the Golden Rule to application both *by* and *to* people with broadly normal basic needs and expectations.

Kant wouldn't be satisfied with this response. What if a person is merely ungenerous, let's say—nothing so otherwise problematic as sadomasochism? As Kant provocatively put it: "Many a man would gladly consent that others . . . not benefit him, if only he might be excused from benefiting *them*." Elevating one's desires above one's sense of duty or rightness also would make it impossible (or anyway inconsistent) to contravene one's desires in the name of what is right or just, as surely we should. Kant points out that few judges, say, would want to be sent to prison even if they had committed a crime. So how can they consistently send some other criminal to prison?

Harry Gensler, in the reading to follow (Reading 24), suggests one answer to the objection about the judge. On Gensler's reading, again, the Golden Rule is a consistency requirement, specifically about the relation between my judgments/actions toward others and my judgments about the same action were roles reversed. Thus, according to Gensler, "a conscientious judge *should* . . . be able to say that he should be jailed if he acted as the criminal did". This kind of impartiality is even a criterion for a good judge.

These responses try very hard to preserve the spirit of the Golden Rule. As to its letter, though, they may seem a bit improvised and even sometimes at odds with each other (for example, the asparagus-hater is supposed to consider the other person's preferences, but the judge is supposed to consider his or her own . . . which is it?). The best conclusion may be that consistency is not the *only* requirement for moral action. The Golden Rule cannot be our only tool for moral thinking. Gensler himself observes that

[t]he golden rule . . . doesn't replace regular moral norms. It isn't an infallible guide on which actions are right or wrong; it doesn't give all the answers. It only prescribes consistency—that we not have our actions

(toward another) be out of harmony with our desires (toward a reversed situation). . . . If we violate the golden rule, then we're violating the spirit of fairness and concern that lie at the heart of morality.

The Golden Rule tests our moral *coherence*, as Gensler puts it. We must be willing to judge ourselves by the same standards we use to judge others, and vice versa. That already is a long way toward ethics. Still, the Golden Rule by itself does not require any particular standard: those must come from elsewhere.

READING 24

Selections from *Ethics and the Golden Rule*

HARRY GENSLER

The following brief selection presents the Golden Rule and deals with some of the objections to it just considered. It takes the form of a Socratic dialogue. You may know that the classic dialogues featuring Socrates were written by the Athenian philosopher Plato (428–348 BCE), a leading student of Socrates (471–399 BCE) and a germinal philosopher in his own right. However, dialogues featuring Socrates were actually a widespread literary form in the centuries that followed, and philosophers right down to the present continue to adopt the form.

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Aristides: Where are you going, Socrates?

Socrates: I'm on my way to the forum. There's a sale on togas.

Aristides: Not so fast—I'd like to ask you some questions. Since you so often question others, can you object if others want to question you?

Socrates: Well no, assuming that the questioning is done in a similar way in similar circumstances. What do you want to ask me?

Aristides: Just this, Socrates. What is the most important principle about how to treat other people?

Socrates: You really like to ask big questions, don't you?

Aristides: I'm just following your example. Please don't evade answering.

Socrates: OK, the most important principle is the golden rule: treat others as you want to be treated. No other principle about how to treat others is more important than this.

Aristides: Indeed, there is much to commend the golden rule. Imagine how much better the world would be if we all followed it. People then seemingly wouldn't lie or steal or act cruelly toward others—since they surely don't want others to treat them that way.

Socrates: Yes, and imagine what it would be like if rulers would ask how they themselves would want to be governed—and if nurses would ask how they would want to be treated while sick—and so on for others in society.

Aristides: Indeed, life would then be better for us all. Perhaps this is why the golden rule is so widely admired by the great masses of people.

Socrates: Yes, surely. Unfortunately the golden rule is sometimes more admired than followed. Have I answered your question to your satisfaction?

Aristides: No, I am disappointed with your answer.

Socrates: Why do you say that?

Aristides: Your answer is too ordinary; it is not the answer of an intelligent philosopher. Anyone with your expertise in criticizing ideas should see that the golden rule has serious defects.

Socrates: Like what?

Aristides: Suppose I am sick and want my doctor to remove my appendix; then, by the golden rule, I ought to remove my doctor's appendix. What could be sillier than that?

Socrates: I see your point. By the golden rule, I am to treat others as I want to be treated. So if I want my doctor to be polite to me, then I should be polite to her. And if I want her to remove my appendix, then I should remove her appendix. But the latter is silly.

Aristides: You understand my objection well. And I could give many further objections of a similar sort.

Socrates: I am impressed by the sharpness of your mind. Had I known of this, I would have answered in a more rigorous way.

Aristides: Please explain further.

Socrates: The popular masses have the golden rule, but they do not understand it correctly. They take it very literally, to mean something like "If YOU WANT X TO DO A TO YOU, THEN DO A TO X," do they not?

Aristides: Yes, and this entails the absurdity: IF YOU WANT X TO REMOVE YOUR APPENDIX, THEN REMOVE X'S APPENDIX.

Socrates: The problem is that you, like the popular masses, take the golden rule too literally.

Aristides: Then how should I take it?

Socrates: Properly understood, the golden rule is a consistency principle. It forbids me to combine two things: (a) treating another in a given way, and (b) not being willing that I would be treated the same way in the same situation.

Aristides: Please explain further.

Socrates: Suppose your father is hard of hearing and you are deciding how loud to speak to him. How would you apply the literal golden rule to this case?

Aristides: I, with normal hearing, don't want my father to speak loudly to me; so I shouldn't speak loudly to him. This is silly, since it ignores differences in circumstances. Even if the other person is in a very different situation, I should treat him as I want to be treated myself, in my present situation.

Socrates: Exactly. Now how would you apply *my* formulation?

Aristides: I'd imagine a reversed situation—where I have my father's properties, including not hearing well, and he has mine. Surely I'd desire that I'd be spoken to loudly in this situation; so I'd speak loudly to him.

Socrates: Exactly. And do you see that this role-reversal idea would also solve your appendix case, and many other problem cases?

Aristides: Yes, I see that your version, in which you imagine yourself in the other person's exact place (and thus having all the other person's properties) is a big advance. But it doesn't get around Immanuel Kant's objection.

Socrates: And what is his objection?

Aristides: Suppose I am a judge about to sentence a criminal to jail. Now if I were in the exact place of the criminal then I wouldn't want to be sent to jail. So, by your golden rule, I shouldn't send the criminal to jail.

Socrates: Sorry, you misapplied my formulation. You shouldn't ask: "If I were in the exact place of this criminal (and thus had his desires about how he wants to be treated), then would I desire to be jailed?"

Aristides: Then what should I ask?

Socrates: You should ask: "Do I (now) desire that if I were in this criminal's exact place then I would be jailed?" A conscientious judge should be able to say YES to this—and desire that he would be jailed in a similar way if he acted as the criminal did.

Aristides: I think I grasp your point. But could you give me another example to make this distinction clearer?

Socrates: Suppose you have a two-year-old son who likes to put his fingers into electrical sockets—and the only way to stop him is by a spanking. Could you spank him, consistent with the golden rule?

Aristides: It seems not, since if I were in his exact place (and thus had the desires of a two-year-old), I wouldn't want to be spanked.

Socrates: You said it wrong again. Remember how we dealt with the case about the judge and criminal?

Aristides: OK Socrates, I understand it now. I should ask how I'm *now* willing that I'd be treated if I were in my son's exact place. Knowing what I do now, I surely desire that my parents would have spanked me in this situation—since this might save me from electrocution.

Socrates: Correct. The golden rule prescribes a consistency between my *present* actions and desires; it isn't about what I'd desire in different circumstances. The golden rule forbids me to combine two things: (a) treating another in a given way, and (b) not being willing that I would be treated the same way in the same situation.

Aristides: It's plausible that the golden rule is a consistency requirement; but how would you argue for this? Suppose I steal your toga, but I'm unwilling that if I were in your place then my toga be stolen. Why is this inconsistent?

Socrates: Does not consistency require that we make similar evaluations about similar cases (a requirement that I call "impartiality")—and that we keep our moral beliefs in harmony with our actions, intentions, and desires (a requirement that I call "conscientiousness")?

Aristides: Yes. Impartiality and conscientiousness are kinds of consistency.

Socrates: Now suppose you are consistent and steal my toga. If you are conscientious, then you wouldn't do this unless you believed that this act was all right (permissible). And if you are impartial, then you wouldn't believe this unless you believed that it would be all right for the same thing to be done to you in the same circumstances. And if you are conscientious, then you wouldn't believe this unless you were willing that the same thing would be done to you in the same circumstances.

Aristides: So if I am conscientious and impartial, then I wouldn't steal your toga unless I'm willing that my toga be stolen in the same circumstances.

Socrates: Exactly.

Aristides: I must admit, Socrates, that your logic here is impeccable. And yet I have another question.

Socrates: Ask away.

Aristides: Can we deduce all our concrete duties from the golden rule—so that this rule is all we need for morality?

Socrates: No to both questions. First, we can't *deduce* our concrete duties from the golden rule. The rule, again, is a consistency principle—and thus a guide on how to be more consistent and hence more rational in our actions and moral beliefs; so it tells us to be consistent, but it doesn't tell us what to do or believe on concrete issues. Second, to apply the rule most adequately and rationally we need other things as well. We especially need knowledge about the case and the ability to imagine ourselves, vividly and accurately, in the place of the other person, on the receiving end of the action.

Aristides: This makes sense to me.

SYMPATHY, OR INSIDE THE GOLDEN RULE

There is another use of the Golden Rule, and the logic of appeals to consistency in general, that has been implicit in our discussion so far but now needs to be highlighted. This will both give us a better sense of the Golden Rule's true power and a clearer sense of its limits.

Kant, Gensler, and others debate the Golden Rule as an appeal to logic—to consistency. It is very useful as such, even if consistency is not the whole story. But consider now another aspect of the Golden Rule: its *psychological* value. Role reversal or “putting ourselves into other people's shoes” need not be just a logical move. It also invites and inclines us to really consider what things are like for others. It can get us out of our own habitual self-enclosure for a time and encourage us to pay fuller attention to others' basic needs and legitimate expectations.

In short, role reversal can also invite and provoke empathy or sympathy. Viewed this way, the Golden Rule is not so much a criterion or decision-rule but another, familiar and powerful prompt to “take care” in the sense of systematically *paying attention*. Sympathy is not the whole story either—remember our definition in Chapter 1: there are two other senses of “taking care” also—but it can go deeper than the kinds of consistency arguments considered so far in this chapter. We might recall also the words of Margaret Urban Walker (Reading 2) that we took as a touchstone: ethics is a way of “putting and keeping ourselves in touch with the realities of ourselves and specific others.” The Golden Rule can help.

To truly “reverse roles” is to ask, honestly and persistently, how things are for others affected by our actions. It is to try to avoid projecting our own desires and wishes onto them, but still asking how *we* would feel if we “stood in their place,” as C. I. Lewis puts it, with *their* desires, needs, and expectations in the situation we face or are considering creating. It is tricky, for sure (*who* exactly is this person, again?) but not impossible to at least approximate in good faith.

How would you feel if roles were reversed? Projective imagination—truly trying to think of others’ situations sympathetically—may change our judgments and actions simply because we are already committed to taking care for others as well as ourselves. We already care—but perhaps have not paid quite enough attention. How would *you* feel if others talked about you behind your back the way you are talking about them right now? How would I feel if my partner cheated on me in the way that perhaps I am tempted to cheat on him or her?

Historically, one major use of role-reversal arguments was against slavery. For just one of a vast number of possible examples, consider these words from Angelina Grimke’s *Appeal to the Christian Women of the South* (1836):

Are you willing to enslave your children? You start back with horror at such a question. But why, if slavery is no wrong to those upon whom it is imposed? Why if, as has often been said, slaves are happier than their masters, free from the cares of providing for themselves? Do you not perceive that as soon as this golden rule of action is applied to *yourselves*, you shrink from the test?

The rejection of slavery was the obvious conclusion. But the effect of the argument was as much or more to create sympathy as to force people into dealing with their inconsistency. Grimke’s argument plays upon the “horror” that her suggested role reversal evoked. And rightly so. It is not a horror at inconsistency, but a horror at slavery itself, when imagined as intimately and painfully as this.

A century later the civil rights movement prompted the same kind of appeal. Martin Luther King Jr. used role reversal in his famously powerful “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” challenging white people to put themselves in a black person’s shoes: “When you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will,” or “when your first name becomes ‘nigger,’ your middle name becomes ‘boy,’ . . . then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait.” President John F. Kennedy, finally throwing the full weight of the Federal government against the institutional racism of the South, used the same role-reversal argument: “If a Negro can’t enjoy the full and free life which all of us want, then who among us would be content to have the color of his skin changed and stand in his place?” To white people he says: imagine *yourself* black—and then see not only what moral judgments you are willing to make, or needing to change, but also how it *feels*.

CONSTRUCTED ANALOGIES

There is yet another use of role reversal or argument from “like cases” common among philosophers—another powerful form of moral argument, like the Golden Rule, although often misunderstood. This is an appeal to *invented* “like cases” or *constructed analogies*. The logic of such cases or analogies may be a little harder to see, but it also opens up intriguing new possibilities

THE LOGIC OF INVENTED CASES

Consider our first example again. The argument, remember, was that I cannot morally misrepresent my car in order to sell it if I would object to anyone else doing the same to me.

Now notice that it does not matter whether I am actually buying a car or not. It is enough that *if* I were buying a car I would have such objections. Here, then, you have a “like case” that is not exactly real (suppose I’m not really buying a car right now), yet it does the work that’s needed. A space opens here—indeed the necessity emerges here—for what we could call “moral imagination.”

If you worked on **Going Farther #8**, you have already encountered some striking invented scenarios. There was Bob’s precious Bugatti (a very fancy car), in particular, sitting forlornly at the end of a railroad siding onto which Bob must divert a runaway train to save a child’s life (p. 210). Peter Singer (discussed there) explicitly uses the “Judge Like Cases Alike” principle in his argument. After spelling out the Bob/Bugatti example, he writes

If you . . . think that it was very wrong of Bob not to throw the switch that would have diverted the train and saved the child’s life, then it is hard to see how you could deny that it is also very wrong not to send money to one of the [famine-relief] organizations. . . . Unless, that is, there is some morally important difference between the two situations that I have overlooked.

Again, there’s no denying that the situations are *different*, indeed wildly different. Letting a train run over an innocent kid rather than sacrifice your precious vintage car certainly doesn’t look the same as spending money going to restaurants or on consumer goods rather than sending it to famine relief. But the question is whether the two situations are different in some *morally relevant* way. Singer argues that they are not. As the argument proceeds, you begin to see the uncomfortable similarities. Both are cases of declining to do something that would demonstrably save a life (or many lives) in order, instead, to make life slightly more commodious for ourselves. The moralist’s conclusion is that it should be troubling in both cases. The point of the invented case is just to make the logic of those troubles stand out more starkly in the real case.

THE RIGHT TO LIFE AND THE UNCONSCIOUS VIOLINIST

Here is a particularly famous example of an argument from an invented case. On both sides of the abortion debate it is usually assumed that if the fetus has a right to life, then choosing abortion violates that right and is wrong. The philosopher Judith Thomson argued in a famous essay that this conclusion doesn't always follow.

Imagine, Thomson says, that

You wake up in the morning and find yourself back-to-back in bed with an unconscious violinist. A famous unconscious violinist. He has been found to have a fatal kidney ailment, and the Society of Music Lovers has canvassed all the available medical records and found that you alone have the right blood type to help. They have therefore kidnapped you, and last night the violinist's circulatory system was plugged into yours, so that your kidneys can be used to extract poisons from his blood as well as your own.

If you unplug yourself now, the Music Lovers point out, the violinist will die, and after all the violinist does have a right to life. . . . Yet surely, Thomson argues, you have the *right* to unplug yourself, even so. It might be *nice* to donate nine months' use of your kidneys to the violinist, but you cannot be compelled to do so.

Suppose you agree—that is, suppose you think that you have the right to unplug yourself in this scenario. Therefore, even if another being is dependent upon you for life support (and in Thomson's case a being who is clearly and uncontroversially a human being—and “innocent,” too), and even if that being has a right to life, you believe that you may still, morally, pull the plug. It's still within your rights to refuse to go through with it.

Thomson argues that abortion in some cases, especially if you are pregnant unintentionally or against your will, is the moral equivalent of pulling the plug on the violinist. By analogy, then, in the case of abortion, Thomson concludes that the fetus's right to life does not necessarily make abortion a violation of that right. You did not ask for this other life to be hooked to yours; you are being asked to make an enormous sacrifice of your time and your body's very energies; you acknowledge that there will be a loss if you “unplug”—the dependent being will die—but your right to your own body can still take precedence. “Pulling the plug” is morally permissible, she concludes, in such cases.

SO . . . ?

This is a pretty wild analogy. It's not something that is actually likely to happen. But that it is a completely imaginary scenario, once again, does not affect the problem of inconsistency. *If* you would object to being hooked up to the violinist, real or not, then you ought to support abortion rights in at least some cases—so the argument goes. Indeed, precisely the fact

that it is not likely to happen helps make Thomson's point. We would never stand for kidnapping people off the streets to provide life support for dying musicians—so, if outlawing abortion would really be analogous to *that*, we should not outlaw abortion either.

One nice feature of this analogy is that it puts males into a situation that Thomson thinks is *like* being unintentionally pregnant. (Notice that only an imaginary case is likely to do this—surely an advantage of the imaginary.) She suspects that few men, even those who are strongly anti-abortion, would agree that they have no right to unplug themselves from the violinist. But then the challenge is acute: can they then consistently be anti-abortion? What's the difference between this case and unintentional pregnancy?

As usual, the same options apply: question the likeness, or change one of the inconsistent judgments. Some deny that being tied to the violinist really is like being unwillingly pregnant. Conservatives argue that a relevant difference between pregnancy and Thomson's analogy is that pregnancy is a known risk of having sex, even with contraception. In Thomson's case you're simply kidnapped off the street and involuntarily plugged to the violinist, but in the case of having sex, even with contraception, you are quite aware that pregnancy is at least possible. It's not quite so involuntary. You need to take some responsibility.

This is a fair point. Maybe the two cases aren't so "like," and we can consistently judge them differently.

On the other hand, this difference does not always hold. In some cases, at least, pregnancy is that involuntary. Think of pregnancy caused by rape. Though many pro-life advocates make an exception in this case, not all do. Some still insist that the fetus's right to life has priority. There, Thomson's analogy has special bite (unless, of course, those pro-life advocates agree that they must stay hooked up to the violinist for nine months too—restoring consistency in a more extreme, and frankly unlikely, way).

Thomson or her defenders might also recast the analogy to acknowledge the conservative response. Suppose it was known, for example, that the Society of Music Lovers was looking for someone to hook up to the violinist, and you went out for a walk of your own free will even knowing that there was a small probability that you might be kidnapped for this purpose off the street. (There's a non-zero probability now, after all, isn't there?) Maybe you even took an escort. This might be like using contraception—taking reasonable precautions—even knowing that there is a small probability that it won't work. Don't you still have a right to unplug?

Thomson would say so. After all, people can't really be obliged to stay inside all the time just because there is a small chance they might find themselves kidnapped and hooked up to the violinist if they go out. You're not responsible, even a little, as long as you take reasonable precautions. It would

not be fair to ask more. This might be like saying that women can't really be obliged to refrain from sex totally until they are ready to carry through with an unintended pregnancy. Again, she holds, you're *not* responsible, even a little, as long as you take reasonable precautions—it would not be fair to ask for more. What do you think?

READING 25

“The Nuclear Train to the Future”

RICHARD AND VAL ROUTLEY

RICHARD ROUTLEY (later Richard Sylvan, 1935–1996) and **VAL ROUTLEY** (later Val Plumwood, 1939–2008) were Australian philosophers and activists and key early contributors to the emerging field of environmental philosophy. Richard Routley (Sylvan) wrote one of the earliest essays in the field, and Val Routley (Plumwood) penned a series of influential and vigorous books giving shape to ecofeminism. This excerpt is the introductory section of the Routleys' article “Nuclear Power: Some Ethical and Social Dimensions” in Tom Regan and Don Vandever, eds., *And Justice for All: New Introductory Essays in Philosophy and Public Policy* (Rowman and Allenheld, 1982). The original develops the main argument in detail and responds to a variety of common objections.

The Routleys use a constructed analogy to challenge the ethics of the current practice of producing large quantities of highly radioactive wastes as a byproduct of the generation of electricity in nuclear power plants. We currently have no well-established and reliable system for storing these wastes safely for even a tiny fraction of their toxic lifetimes, which in some cases run close to a million years—literally hundreds of times longer than any human civilizational form has existed. Yet this does not seem to have given us much pause. Shouldn't it?

For many who oppose this practice, it represents an almost unthinkable imposition upon future generations, literally unimaginably far into the future. That the far future is so unimaginable, however, may also be part of the problem. Because it is so distant and extended in time, we may discount it dramatically. There is even an economic argument that we *should*

From Richard and Val Routley, “Nuclear Power: Some Ethical and Social Dimensions,” in Tom Regan and Don Vandever, eds., *And Justice for All: New Introductory Essays in Philosophy and Public Policy*, pp. 116–119. Copyright Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.

(literally) discount the future in this way. Or we may simply not consider it at all. Out of sight, out of mind. We of the present generations might be more moved by other arguments against nuclear power, such as the dangers it may pose to us right now. The aim of this moral analogy, though, is to keep the long-term consequences in moral view. Can anything justify imposing toxic wastes upon, as the reading claims, up to 40,000 generations in the future, for the benefit of ourselves and a few generations in the present or near future? Especially when we could easily avoid using nuclear power entirely if we simply used more energy-efficient appliances or kept the air conditioning a few degrees warmer in the summer?

A long distance country train has just pulled out. The train which is crowded carries both passengers and freight. At an early stop in the journey someone consigns as freight, to a far distant destination, a package which contains a highly toxic and explosive gas. This is packed in a very thin container which, as the consigner is aware, may well not contain the gas for the full distance for which it is consigned, and certainly will not do so if the train should strike any real trouble, for example, if the train should be derailed or involved in a collision, or if some passenger should interfere inadvertently or deliberately with the freight, perhaps trying to steal some of it. All of these sorts of things have happened on some previous journeys. If the container should break the resulting disaster would probably kill at least some of the people on the train in adjacent carriages, while others could be maimed or poisoned or sooner or later incur serious diseases.

Most of us would roundly condemn such an action. What might the consigner of the parcel say to try to justify it? He might say that it is *not certain* that the gas will escape, or that the world needs his product and it is his duty to supply it, or that in any case he is not responsible for the train or the people on it.

These sorts of excuses, however, would normally be seen as ludicrous when set in this context. Unfortunately, similar excuses are often not so seen when the consigner, again a (responsible) businessman, puts his workers' health or other peoples' welfare at risk.

Suppose he says that it is his own and others' pressing needs which justify his action. The company he controls, which produces the material as a by-product, is in bad financial straits, and could not afford to produce a better container even if it knew how to make one. If the company fails, he and his family will suffer, his employees will lose their jobs and have to look for others, and the whole company town, through loss of spending, will be worse off. The

poor and unemployed of the town, whom he would otherwise have been able to help, will suffer especially.

Few people would accept such grounds as justification. Even where there are serious risks and costs to oneself or some group for whom one is concerned one is usually considered not to be entitled to simply transfer the heavy burden of those risks and costs onto other uninvolved parties, especially where they arise from one's own, or one's group's chosen life-style.

The matter of nuclear waste has many moral features which resemble the train case. There is no known proven safe way to package the highly toxic wastes generated by the nuclear plants that will be spread around the world as large-scale nuclear development goes ahead. . . . Each produces, on average, annual wastes containing 1000 times the radioactivity of the Hiroshima bomb. Much of this waste is extremely toxic. For example, a millionth of a gramme of plutonium is enough to induce a lung cancer. A leak of even a part of the waste material could involve much loss of life, widespread disease and genetic damage, and contamination of immense areas of land. Wastes will include the reactors themselves, which will have to be abandoned after their expected life times of perhaps 40 years, and which, some have estimated, may require 1½ million years to reach safe levels of radioactivity.

Nuclear wastes must be kept suitably isolated from the environment for their entire active lifetime. For fission products the required storage period averages a thousand years or so, and for transuranic elements, which include plutonium, there is a half million to a million year storage problem. Serious problems have arisen with both short-term and proposed long-term methods of storage, even with the comparatively small quantities of waste produced over the last twenty years. Short-term methods of storage require continued human intervention, while proposed longer term methods are subject to both human interference and risk of leakage through non-human factors.

No one with even a slight knowledge of the geological and climatic history of the earth over the last million years, a period whose fluctuations in climate we are only just beginning to [gauge] and which has seen four Ice Ages, could be confident that a rigorous guarantee of safe storage could be provided for the vast period of time involved. Nor does the history of human affairs over the last 3000 years give ground for confidence in safe storage by method requiring human intervention over perhaps a million years. Proposed long-term storage methods such as storage in granite formations or in salt mines, are largely speculative and relatively untested, and have already proved to involve difficulties with attempts made to put them into practice. Even as regards expensive recent proposals

for first embedding concentrated wastes in glass and encapsulating the result in multilayered metal containers before rock deposit, simulation models reveal that radioactive material may not remain suitably isolated from human environments. In short, the best present storage proposals carry very real possibilities of irradiating future people and damaging their environment.

Given the heavy costs which could be involved for the future, and given the known limits of technology, it is methodologically unsound to bet, as nuclear nations have, on the discovery of safe procedures for storage of wastes. Any new procedures will probably be but variations on present proposals, and subject to the same inadequacies. For instance, not only have none of the proposed methods for safe storage been properly tested, but they may well prove to involve unforeseen difficulties and risks when an attempt is made to put them into practice on a commercial scale. Only a method that could provide a rigorous guarantee of safety over the storage period, that placed safety beyond reasonable doubt, would be acceptable.

It is difficult to see how such rigorous guarantees could be given concerning either the geological or future human factors. But even if an economically viable, rigorously safe long term storage method *could* be devised, there is the problem of guaranteeing that it would be universally and invariably *used*. The assumption that it would be (especially if, as appears likely, such a method proved expensive economically and politically) seems to presuppose a level of efficiency, perfection, and concern for the future which has not previously been encountered in human affairs, and has certainly not been conspicuous in the nuclear industry.

The risks imposed on the future by proceeding with nuclear development are, then, *significant*. Perhaps 40,000 generations of future people could be forced to bear significant risks resulting from the provision of the (extravagant) energy use of only a small proportion of the people of 10 generations.

Nor is the risk of direct harm from the escape or misuse of radioactive materials the only burden the nuclear solution imposes on the future. Because the energy provided by nuclear fission is merely a stop gap, it seems probable that in due course the same problem, that of making a transition to renewable sources of energy, will have to be faced again by a future population which will probably, again as a result of our actions, be very much worse placed to cope with it. Their world will most likely be a world which is seriously depleted of non-renewable resources, and in which such renewable resources as forests and soils as remain, resources which inevitably form an important part of the basis of life, are run-down or destroyed. Such points tell against the idea that future people

must be, if not direct beneficiaries of energy from nuclear fission, at least indirect beneficiaries.

The “solution” then is to buy time for contemporary society at a price which not only creates serious problems for future people but which reduces their ability to cope with these problems. Like the consigner in the train parable, contemporary industrial society proposes, in order to get itself out of a mess arising from its own life-style—the creation of economies dependent on an abundance of non-renewable energy, which is limited in supply—to pass on costs and risks of serious harm to others who will obtain no corresponding benefits. The “solution” may enable the avoidance of some uncomfortable changes in the lifetime of those now living and their immediate descendants, just as the consigner’s action avoids uncomfortable changes for him and those in his immediate surroundings, but at the expense of passing heavy burdens to other uninvolved parties whose opportunity to lead decent lives may be seriously jeopardised.

If we apply to the nuclear situation the standards of behaviour and moral principles generally acknowledged (in principle, if not so often in fact) in the contemporary world, it is not easy to avoid the conclusion that nuclear development involves injustice with respect to the future on a grand scale.



FOR REVIEW

1. Explain “Judging like cases alike.”
2. What argument does the bumpersticker “EXECUTION STOPS A BEATING HEART” suggest?
3. When two moral stances about seemingly comparable situations are inconsistent, what are the three ways that we can logically respond?
4. Explain the first possible response with an example.
5. Explain the second possible response with an example.
6. Explain the third possible response with an example.
7. What does Harry Gensler mean when he says that the Golden Rule “tests our moral coherence”?
8. State Gensler’s formulation of the Golden Rule *exactly* (since according to him exactness is key).

9. How does the text connect the Golden Rule and the development of sympathy?
10. How can a constructed analogy be relevant to “judging like cases alike”?
11. What is the point of Judith Thomson’s violinist analogy?
12. Explain the Routleys’ “nuclear train” analogy. What do they conclude from it?

QUICK REFERENCE: JUDGING LIKE CASES ALIKE

PAY ATTENTION

Systematically and honestly extend your moral reasons in one kind of case to other “like cases.” (Example: if you oppose abortion to protect “innocent life,” then consider other cases where other kinds of innocent life are at stake.) Do you judge them similarly? If not, why not?

WHEN INCONSISTENCY ARISES

When your judgments vary between these cases, consider your options.

- You could argue that the alleged “like cases” are not really alike. In that case you need to figure out the *morally relevant difference* between the cases and explain what difference that difference makes.
- You could change your judgment about the “like case” or cases.
- You could change your judgment about the original case or cases.

THE GOLDEN RULE

Test the coherence of your moral reasons using role reversal. Would you consent to being treated the same way if roles were reversed? Imagine yourself on the receiving end of the action in the place of the other person(s), instead of being the actor. How does the action look then?

CONSIDER MORAL ANALOGIES AS NEEDED

Carefully invent analogous scenarios, if needed, to test moral judgments for consistency in reversed-role situations.



FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

10.1 TAKING UP THE CHALLENGE

Working through “like cases” is a way of *thinking*. It is a way of clarifying what’s morally at stake in a specific situation by comparing it with other seemingly similar cases to see what the relevant differences are—and aren’t. And it is a way of working toward greater consistency and clarity in your moral views generally by comparing them with each other so as to bring out your general moral commitments.

Here are some moral questions to approach by reversing roles and thinking about “like cases.”

- **Sexual fidelity** to a partner or spouse. You are tempted, say, to begin a sexual relationship with someone else. The reversed-role question would be: What would you consent to your partner or spouse doing, in their best selves, in a similar situation—when *you* could be the jilted or cheated-upon partner?

Of course this depends on how you understand your commitment to each other. In an open marriage or “polyamorous” relationship, sexual relationships with others would not be considered “cheating” and may even be encouraged. Suppose, though, you have not talked or reached a clear understanding about such things. (Though probably the best answer in that case is just to talk.) Or suppose you and your partner have traditional expectations . . . but then again, even “traditional expectations” have some complexities and false bottoms. . . .

- Is **littering** a moral issue—that is, in terms of this chapter, does littering involve actions that would be unacceptable to the litterer if roles were reversed? If so, can you invent some scenarios that might make this “moral incoherence” clear to would-be litterers?
- **Total honesty with clients and customers** in advertising, sales pitches, disclosures, and date-sharing. Remembering C. I. Lewis’s version of the Golden Rule may be helpful here:

[If] there are three people involved in the situation, A, B, and C . . . The right thing to do unless must be acceptable to you whether you stand in the place of A, B, or C.

In this case, salespeople must earn a living, customers want a good product for a reasonable price, and employers need to sell products. Three roles, often considered to be at odds: What rule for truthfulness could be accepted by all three? Once again there are also some relevant traditional expectations, though rather sharply opposed: we tend to think that total honesty is

the only moral policy, but not expect anything like it in practice. So what is the right rule to follow in this case?

- **Whistleblowing.** When should an employee publicly reveal wrong doing on the part of an employer? And what should be the response of the public and the employee's own organization?

Now go back to the general issues you explored in the main set of questions at the ends of Chapters 5 through 8:

- Ethics at school
- Ethics at work
- Drugs
- Distribution of wealth
- Other animals
- Climate change

The text of this chapter began to explore the question of other animals using role reversal. Consider the others now. Can “like-case” or Golden-Rule thinking contribute to our thinking about these broad questions? How?

Remember that the answer in some of these cases could be NO: that the Golden Rule does not get much grip on some of these questions. Consider drugs, for example, where the primary question seems to be about one's relation to oneself rather than relations to specific other people. Perhaps we must call on other moral values and other ways of thinking to address such questions—and of course they are available! On the other hand, role reversal might apply quite powerfully to questions like the distribution of wealth. And what about ethics at work? Or climate change?

10.2 THE WELFARE ISSUE AS A CASE IN POINT, CONTINUED

Question 9.4 (“The Welfare Issue as a Case in Point”) challenged you to apply the critical-thinking tools of Chapter 9 to the welfare question in particular. We can now take another step and apply the “judging like cases alike” challenge to the same question.

To judge like cases alike when welfare is at stake is, at the very least, not to judge the question differently from different standpoints of need: that is, not to oppose it if you imagine yourself rich but favor it if you imagine yourself poor. The Golden Rule applies here just as everywhere else. As Chapter 5 notes, Lawrence Kohlberg suggests that we imagine “moral musical chairs,” which we could visualize as systematically going through all of the affected persons or roles—from (in this case) taxpayers, administrators, welfare recipients,

children on welfare, and all the rest, including fairly indirectly affected people such as people who might receive more benefits or advantages if the money spent on welfare were spent on something else instead—and being sure that when we finally arrive at a judgment, it is a judgment that we are willing to affirm from every “chair.” Which chair or chairs we actually occupy in real life is not so important: the key moral sense is that “I could be anyone.”

A more systematic way to picture something like this “moral musical chairs” was worked out in the later 20th century by the American political philosopher John Rawls and advanced in his book *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard University, 1971), outlined in **Going Farther #7**. Rawls asks us to imagine that we are working out a whole system of distribution of key social goods, from political and other “offices” to economic goods, from a vantage point or “contract” situation where—here is the key thing—we don’t know what actual position we will occupy in the system that ultimately results. That is, to make the rules by a fully moral procedure would be as if we make the rules before we know how the rules will actually affect us individually. If we could be *anyone* in the system that is being created, what kind of system would we create?

Among the “Limbering Up” questions in Chapter 1 was a Rawlsian sort of thought-experiment: designing a company without knowing what your own status will be within it. If you did that exercise, review your answers before proceeding. But now let’s vary it. Here is the basic challenge: *try designing a welfare system, in particular, without knowing what your own status will be within it.*

Maybe you’ll be heir to some immense family fortune. Or maybe you’ll be a war veteran with post-traumatic stress disorder, barely holding on to a job with no health coverage. Or an entrepreneur on the edge with one chance to make it big, or to end up on the streets. Or a caregiver for well-loved but very dependent children or parents or others, with few resources. Or many other possible roles. How then will you set up your economic and social system in regard to the needs of the down and out, who might well (but then again might well not) be you? Will the system provide for you/them? Or not? And if so, exactly how and how far?

Going Farther #7 also briefly outlines Rawls’s conclusions: a principle of equality in the case of political liberties, since in the political sphere any increase in one person’s liberties must mean a decrease for someone else; and a principle that allows economic and other *inequalities*, since in the economic sphere one person’s gain does not necessarily mean someone else’s loss, but only as long as they bring the least well-off persons as far up as any arrangement can.

Review your own answers to **Going Farther #7** questions about inequalities of wealth as well. How do your answers apply to the specific question of welfare systems under capitalism? Try to define your system both as to its general philosophy (that would be the Mission Statement, so to speak, of your welfare system) and some of its specific rules (so you can tell how it would

actually apply to specific cases). You might start by working out together a range of possible types of welfare systems (philosophies plus specific rules and practices). Discuss them as a group.

Once you have envisioned a good and diverse set of possible systems, brainstorm a list of roles or “chairs” in your world: the homeless veteran, the overburdened caregiver, the overtaxed entrepreneur . . . and who else? Now return to your negotiations with your class’s list of specific roles in mind; it should help to make the consequences and potential problems and issues more vivid. Come to some group decision, if you can. Then randomly assign these roles to actual individuals in your class. Number them and draw numbers out of a hat or something. Once you know who you actually are (for purpose of this exercise), and what kinds of decisions are going to come down that affect you in particular (What happens if you get sick, for instance? What happens if you end up a rich heiress—or a bag lady?), how does your proposed system look to you now?

Remember also that Rawls argues that people under the veil of ignorance would not use overall social utility as their standard. They will not be utilitarians! This is because when life prospects are at stake, we are (according to Rawls) not risk-takers. It is rational, he says, to minimize the risks of really bad outcomes—say, having nothing and starving on the streets in a society with no “safety net”—rather than play the odds, even if in general the odds are very good. Since we only get one chance at life, he holds that people would be most concerned to secure the best possible worst-off roles. We disvalue the really bad prospects much more than we value the marginally better ones that might be possible if some people were consigned to miserable fates.

The upshot of all of this? One conclusion is that it *is* possible to think about the welfare question with something like the Golden Rule. Another is that this is complex and difficult (as well, I hope, as revealing and interesting). So: once again . . . what do you think?

10.3 “SEAMLESS GARMENTS”

Modern Catholic moral theologians are not merely “pro-life” when it comes to fetuses but argue for what they call a “seamless garment” of respect for life in all cases, which to them means being not only anti-abortion but also anti-war, anti-assisted suicide, and anti-capital punishment, and pro-environment, pro-welfare, and pro-animal. In this they differ from many Protestant pro-life activists, who tend to be pro-life on abortion but conservative on most of these other issues. If we’re going to be pro-life, these moralists argue, we have to be pro-life across the board. Thus Catholic moral theology challenges those who wish to be pro-life on some issues but not on others to “judge like cases alike”—to ask if there really is a difference between those issues, and if not, to “get consistent.” (See Notes for references and links.)

Of course, there are other possible responses. Perhaps some of those issues *are* relevantly different from abortion so that defending the fetus's right to life does not necessarily imply defending, for example, a poor person's right to food stamps. It is also possible to "get consistent" by giving up one's pro-life views on abortion (perhaps one could still be anti-abortion for other reasons), rather than embracing a pro-life view in other similar cases.

Once again, though, meeting the challenge takes some work. What do you say to it, at bottom? How many of us really are "pro-life" across the board? Must we be? Should we be? How could we not be?

NOTES

Harry Gensler is quoted on page 327 and pages 328–329 from his "Golden Rule" website, <http://www.harryhiker.com/goldrule.htm>. Most of the chronology of the Golden Rule I have from Chapter 5 of Gensler's book *Ethics and the Golden Rule* (Routledge, 2013), where there is a great deal more as well. C. I. Lewis is quoted from his *Values and Imperatives* (Stanford University Press, 1969), p. 129. For other perspectives on the Golden Rule, see Jeffrey Wattles' survey *The Golden Rule* (New York: Oxford, 1996). Abraham Lincoln is cited from his 1854 essay "A Fragment on Slavery."

Judith Jarvis Thomson's "A Defense of Abortion" is one of the most widely reprinted articles in recent philosophical ethics. It appears, for example, in Steven Cahn's collection *Exploring Ethics* (Oxford, 2009), where my citation can be found on pp. 168–169. Thomson also proposes a number of other striking analogies to other kinds of unintentional and involuntary pregnancy. For commentary, see Rosalind Hursthouse, *Beginning Lives* (Blackwell, 1987), pp. 181–194.

For contemporary Catholic literature on the "seamless garment" or "consistent ethic of life," see Joseph Cardinal Bernardin, *A Moral Vision of America* (Georgetown University Press, 1998). A good introduction can be found at <http://www.priestsforlife.org/magisterium/bernardinwade.html>. For an evangelical version of a similar argument, see Ronald Sider, *Completely Pro-Life: Building a Consistent Stance on Abortion, the Family, Nuclear Weapons, the Poor* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010). Note the subtitle! On the secular side, probably the best example of an ethic that tries to follow a single principle across the board is, once again, Peter Singer's utilitarianism, laid out, for example, in his *Practical Ethics* (Cambridge University Press, 2011).



GOING FARTHER #11

RECONSIDERING OTHER ANIMALS: CONSISTENCY CHALLENGES FOR EVERYONE

In Part II one of the familiar and increasingly pressing questions raised in the exercises was about other-than-human animals, such as today's moral challenges to the killing and eating of other animals, their use in medical experimentation and general product testing, as well as zoos, hunting, genetic manipulation, pet-keeping, and more. For many of us it may be difficult to really understand these issues or know how to think about them in a systematic way. It therefore will probably not surprise you that constructed analogies are an important part of moral philosophers' ways of thinking about such questions.

“TO SERVE MAN”?

Most humans are not in anything like other animals' positions today. But again, as you now know, the scenario does not have to be actual. *If* we would judge our treatment unjustified if we were in the animals' position, that would already make the required moral argument. We'd be inconsistent to treat other animals as we do while refusing to accept the justice of being treated like them *were* we in their position. And very likely we'd acquire some real sympathy for their plight in today's world as well.

Formally, the required features of such an invented scenario are clear. Some other species would have to have the power to dominate and exploit humans to the extent that we can be farmed for their food, as well as kept in zoos for their enjoyment, used in laboratories to save the new dominating species the discomfort or agony of having new products tested on them, and so on. We could imagine, moreover, that they use exactly the same arguments that we use to justify doing the same to other animals now: that they are stronger, higher on the food chain, more advanced mentally—we know the usual reasons.

If you like science fiction, then you probably know that this sort of scenario has already been imagined—in fact, many times. Damon Knight's short story “To Serve Man,” for example, later a *Twilight Zone* episode, takes its title from the new dominating species' altruistic-sounding guidebook (at first they disguise their true motives) . . . but in the end “To Serve Man” turns out to be a cookbook. Gory, but why not? Aren't *our* cookbooks full of exactly the same thing?

So suppose aliens have taken over the earth. Their power and practices compare to ours in about the same way that ours compare to the other animals'. Sure, maybe a few of them are sentimentally attached to us and refuse to eat human flesh or use human-tested products, but the majority are dismissive and value the familiar, long-taken-for-granted pleasures of their palate and other conveniences too much to look too closely or care too much about what happens to us as a result.

To make the topic more concrete and approachable, I sometimes stage a debate in my ethics classes between the aliens and selected spokespeople for humanity—in both cases my students, working in groups. The aliens set up a tribunal to hear a final plea from humans against their proposed exploitation of us. The humans' job is to prepare for that hearing. They realize right away that the aliens are fully aware of humans' own treatment of other animals, so they cannot expect to get away with arguing that the aliens' proposal will cause a great deal of human suffering and death. Suffering and death do not seem to deter *us* very much when it comes to other animals, so why should the aliens care when it comes to us?

But maybe there is something about us that gives us a claim against exploitation that other animals do not have? Maybe we have rights and other animals don't; or maybe somehow our pains and horror count but other animals don't feel them; or . . . well, let's hope there is *something*. But now there is another twist in the proceedings. Another party also shows up for the hearings: other animals (another student team; sometimes this is a surprise). Thus the human teams end up having to make the case for not eating us in the presence of other animals that *we* eat.

Now what? At the very least you can bet that every argument the humans make will be challenged for hypocrisy. For example, as humans we are tempted to appeal to various obvious differences between humans and other animals. But it is not clear why these various differences make a such a major moral difference. Language is a favorite argument, for example. Sometimes it is said that only humans have language at all, but we now know that this is not true (though it is often claimed anyway, with more than a whiff of offhandedness). Still, it seems to be true that we have more developed language than most other animals. But then again, why should the aliens care?

Besides, maybe *their* language is a thousand times more developed than ours. So then the appeal to language would backfire, and we have ended up justifying our own oppression by the very same "rule" we wanted to use to justify our use of other animals. If creatures with more advanced language may oppress those with less advanced language, we're out of luck.

Humans are *not* "on top" of the food chain, meanwhile—that would mean we mainly ate other predators of predators, like hawks or sharks, whereas mostly humans eat vegetarian grazers like cows and chickens—but even if we were, why should it matter to the aliens? And if it did, once again, wouldn't that actually be worse, since by the very same standard, the newly-arrived aliens now stand higher on the food chain than we do? Once again, then, the very same "rule" by which we wanted justify our exploitation of other animals ends up justifying the aliens' exploitation of us.

It's worth noting that Abraham Lincoln mocked the usual arguments for slavery in just such a way.

If A can prove, however conclusively, that he may, of right, enslave B—why may not B snatch the same argument, and prove equally, that he may enslave A? You say A is white, and B is black. It is color, then;—the lighter, having the right to enslave the darker? Take care. By this rule, you are to be slave to the first man you meet, with a fairer skin than your own. You do not mean color exactly?—You mean the whites are intellectually the superiors of the blacks, and, therefore have the right to enslave them? Take care again. By this rule, you are to be slave to the first man you meet, with an intellect superior to your own. But, say you, it is a question of interest; and, if you can make it your interest, you have the right to enslave another. Very well. And if he can make it his interest, he has the right to enslave you.

You begin to suspect that none of these were really the slaveholders' reasons, but again more like offhand self-justifications, rationalizations for what really cannot be justified.

And so you see that the humans are likely to have a tough time of it. We *may* begin to suspect that the usual arguments for our current treatment of other animals, just like the arguments for slavery that Lincoln criticized, are really more like rationalizations, not carefully examined in the least. This alien-invasion scenario, totally unrealistic, totally staged, and indeed even somewhat playful, nonetheless is totally serious as well: it is constructed to test any justifications put forward, and to force any of those that are rationalizations out into the open.

And if there is not some morally relevant difference between our relation to other animals on Earth and the aliens' relation to us, then what? If the first option—"somehow we're different!"—can't be sustained, then there are only the other two: accept that the aliens are justified, which hardly seems acceptable either, or . . . change our own behavior (which is of course the intention of the argument: we need to stop mistreating other animals).

In my classroom scenario, the aliens end by voting on whether any of the humans' arguments has given them a sound moral reason to change their proposed exploitation of humans for food and laboratory testing. They have to give their reasons too, of course. Sometimes the humans catch a break—but usually only when they/we promise to radically change their/our ways. So in the end the question to you, as to my students in this scenario, is: What do *you* think?

THERE ARE ANIMALS, AND THEN THERE ARE ANIMALS?

Another way to apply the "Like Cases Alike" rule to our relations to other animals is to ask whether we treat other animals consistently, or instead favor certain animals over others in unjustifiable ways. Reading 26 does just this. The premise of "A Case for Eating Dogs" is very simple: most Americans would find it morally unimaginable to kill and eat our dogs, who many pet-owners and trainers appreciate as sentient (feeling) beings highly intelligent in their ways, and often treasured companions as well. Yet there are a number of cultures in which eating dogs is quite normal. Meantime, there are animals that we *do* eat, such as pigs, that are at least as sentient and intelligent as dogs. Many Americans have a hard time viewing pig-eating as morally problematic at all, apart from those who honor the old religious restrictions, and yet, is there really any morally relevant difference between them and dogs? Where's our consistency?

READING 26

"A Case for Eating Dogs"

JONATHAN SAFRAN FOER

JONATHAN SAFRAN FOER (b. 1977) is an American novelist as well as author of *Eating Animals*, a widely read book that explores the many sides of our contemporary relation to other animals. Unlike many authors on the subject, Foer writes from a standpoint of complexity and uncertainty—this selection is only one side of his argument—and bases much of his exposition on stories, for, as he puts it, "stories about food are stories about us—our history and our values" (p. 9).

As Foer writes, allegorically, if you are having trouble seeing something—in this case, our relation to the animals we do eat—“look slightly away from it.” It turns out to be a very challenging look indeed. But the moral bottom line should be clear. If we find the eating of dogs, in the way Foer presents it, to be troublesome, then why shouldn’t we find the widespread and everyday eating of animals with equal or greater capacities, such as pigs, to be just as troublesome? What needs to give here?

Despite the fact that it’s perfectly legal in forty-four states, eating “man’s best friend” is as taboo as a man eating his best friend. Even the most enthusiastic carnivores won’t eat dogs. TV guy and sometimes cooker Gordon Ramsay can get pretty macho with baby animals when doing publicity for something he’s selling, but you’ll never see a puppy peeking out of one of his pots. And though he since said he’d electrocute his children if they became vegetarian, I wonder what his response would be if they poached the family pooch.

Dogs are wonderful, and in many ways unique. But they are remarkably unremarkable in their intellectual and experiential capacities. Pigs are every bit as intelligent and feeling, by any sensible definition of the words. They can’t hop into the back of a Volvo, but they can fetch, run and play, be mischievous, and reciprocate affection. So why don’t they get to curl up by the fire? Why can’t they at least be spared being tossed on the fire?

Our taboo against dog eating says something about dogs and a great deal about us.

The French, who love their dogs, sometimes eat their horses.

The Spanish, who love their horses, sometimes eat their cows.

The Indians, who love their cows, sometimes eat their dogs.

While written in a much different context, George Orwell’s words (from *Animal Farm*) apply here: “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others.” The protective emphasis is not a law of nature; it comes from the stories we tell about nature.

So who’s right? What might be the reasons to exclude canine from the menu? The selective carnivore suggests:

Don’t eat companion animals. But dogs aren’t kept as companions in all of the places they are eaten. And what about our petless neighbors? Would we have any right to object if they had dog for dinner?

OK, then:

Don't eat animals with significant mental capacities. If by “significant mental capacities” we mean what a dog has, then good for the dog. But such a definition would also include the pig, cow, chicken, and many species of sea animals. And it would exclude severely impaired humans.

Then:

It's for good reason that the eternal taboos—don't fiddle with your shit, kiss your sister, or eat your companions—are taboo. Evolutionarily speaking, those things are bad for us. But dog eating hasn't been and isn't a taboo in many places, and it isn't in any way bad for us. Properly cooked, dog meat poses no greater health risks than any other meat, nor does such a nutritious meal foster much objection from the physical component of our selfish genes.

And dog eating has a proud pedigree. Fourth-century tombs contain depictions of dogs being slaughtered along with other food animals. It was a fundamental enough habit to have informed language itself: the Sino-Korean character for “fair and proper” (*yeon*) literally translates into “as cooked dog meat is delicious.” Hippocrates praised dog meat as a source of strength. The Romans ate “suckling puppy,” Dakota Indians enjoyed dog liver, and not so long ago Hawaiians ate dog brains and blood. The Mexican hairless dog was the *principal food species* of the Aztecs. Captain Cook ate dog. Roald Amundsen famously ate his sled dogs. (Granted, he was *really* hungry.) And dogs are still eaten to overcome bad luck in the Philippines; as medicine in China and Korea; to enhance libido in Nigeria; and in numerous places, on every continent, because they taste good. For centuries, the Chinese have raised special breeds of dogs, like the black-tongued chow, for chow, and many European countries still have laws on the books regarding postmortem examination of dogs intended for human consumption.

Of course, something having been done just about everywhere just about always is no kind of justification for doing it now. But unlike all farmed meat, which requires the creation and maintenance of animals, dogs are practically begging to be eaten. Three to four million dogs and cats are euthanized annually. This amounts to millions of pounds of meat now being thrown away every year. The simple disposal of these euthanized dogs is an enormous ecological and economic problem. It would be demented to yank pets from homes. But eating those strays, those runaways, those not-quite-cute-enough-to-take and not-quite-well-behaved-enough-to-keep dogs would be killing a flock of birds with one stone and eating it, too.

In a sense it's what we're doing already. Rendering—the conversion of animal protein unfit for human consumption into food for livestock and pets—allows processing plants to transform useless dead dogs into productive members of the food chain. In America, millions of dogs and cats euthanized in animal shelters every year become the food for our food. (Almost twice as many dogs and cats are euthanized as are adopted.) So let's just eliminate this inefficient and bizarre middle step.

This need not challenge our civility. We won't make them suffer any more than necessary. While it's widely believed that adrenaline makes dog meat taste better—hence the traditional methods of slaughter: hanging, boiling alive, beating to death—we can all agree that if we're going to eat them, we should kill them quickly and painlessly, right? For example, the traditional Hawaiian means of holding the dog's nose shut—in order to conserve blood—must be regarded (socially if not legally) as a no-no. Perhaps we could include dogs under the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act. That doesn't say anything about how they're treated during their lives, and isn't subject to any meaningful oversight or enforcement, but surely we can rely on the industry to “self-regulate,” as we do with other eaten animals.

Few people sufficiently appreciate the colossal task of feeding a world of billions of omnivores who demand meat with their potatoes. The inefficient use of dogs—conveniently already in areas of high human population (take note, local-food advocates)—should make any good ecologist blush. One could argue that various “humane” groups are the worst hypocrites, spending enormous amounts of money and energy in a futile attempt to reduce the number of unwanted dogs while at the very same time propagating the irresponsible no-dog-for-dinner taboo. If we let dogs be dogs, and breed without interference, we would create a sustainable, local meat supply with low energy inputs that would put even the most efficient grass-based farming to shame. For the ecologically minded it's time to admit that dog is realistic food for realistic environmentalists.

Can't we get over our sentimentality? Dogs are plentiful, good for you, easy to cook, and tasty, and eating them is vastly more reasonable than going through all the trouble of processing them into protein bits to become the food for the other species that become our food.

For those already convinced, here's a classic Filipino recipe. I haven't tried it myself, but sometimes you can read a recipe and just know.

STEWED DOG, WEDDING STYLE

First, kill a medium-sized dog, then burn off the fur over a hot fire. Carefully remove the skin while still warm and set aside for later (may be used in other recipes). Cut meat into 1" cubes. Marinate meat in mixture of vinegar, peppercorn, salt, and garlic for 2 hours. Fry meat in oil using a large wok over an open fire, then add onions and chopped pineapple and sauté until tender. Pour in tomato sauce and boiling water, add green pepper, bay leaf, and Tabasco. Cover and simmer over warm coals until meat is tender. Blend in puree of dog's liver and cook for additional 5–7 minutes.

A simple trick from the backyard astronomer: if you are having trouble seeing something, look slightly away from it. The most light-sensitive parts of our eyes (those we need to see dim objects) are on the edges of the region we normally use for focusing.

Eating animals has an invisible quality. Thinking about dogs, and their relationship to the animals we eat, is one way of looking askance and making something invisible visible.

YET ANOTHER ANGLE

Reading 27 is a short article by Rhys Southan called "The Vegans Have Landed." Southan has in mind the "To Serve Man" sort of alien-invasion scenario often used, as in the preceding discussion, as a role reversal for our treatment of other animals, especially our use of them for food. In fact, he begins by citing and criticizing Foer's brief use of the very same argument in *Eating Animals*. However, Southan means to offer a more sweeping and new perspective on this argument as well.

Our (mis)treatment of other animals goes well beyond just eating them, he says. We also destroy and degrade their habitat, for a variety of reasons, but in large part for agriculture: that is, growing the grains and vegetables that are essential to everyone's diets and are especially celebrated by vegetarians and vegans (people who use no animal products at all, such as milk, eggs, honey, leather, and so on). As Ted Kerasote also notes (Reading 3), vegetarianism (and by extension veganism) still results in huge numbers of animal deaths, just not of animals we then eat.

"What the argument from alien invasion ultimately shows," Southan concludes, "... is that humans cannot consistently apply the Golden Rule to the rest of the animal kingdom without going a lot farther than vegans are asking us to go." It seems that we would have to reverse the entire project of human domination and displacement of the natural world. Some of us may think that would be a very good idea. However, Southan very much doubts that we would go so far. In fact he denies that we can. "Neutrality is impossible," he says, "in a world with limited resources."

Then again, what if there are more options than just "us or them"? Might ethics even require us to start inventing such options?

READING 27

From “*The Vegans Have Landed*”

RHYS SOUTHAN

RHYS SOUTHAN (b. 1979) is a freelance writer who has written for *The New Inquiry* and *The New York Times* and other publications. He is a student of philosophy at the University of Oxford and is slowly working on a book about the ethics of eating meat. This essay originally appeared online, and as of this writing there were a number of interesting responses that you might also want to survey at <https://aeon.co/essays/if-aliens-treated-us-like-vegans-treat-animals-we-d-be-toast>.

The animal rights movement wants to prevent the most powerful species on the planet from oppressing every other species, just as human rights campaigners try to stop the most powerful people from oppressing those who are least powerful. The problem, they say, is “human privilege,” a privilege that almost all of us abuse. . . . Animals feel pain and care about their survival, and so their advocates say we should expand our circle of concern beyond humans to the rest of the animal kingdom.

According to animal rights theory, respecting the interests of animals in this way would mean abolishing the use of them as resources. So we’d all have to become vegans who neither eat animals nor use any other animal products. Vegan advocates face a daunting challenge, though, since most of us have a strong prejudice in favour of humans. This makes it relatively difficult for us to empathise with non-humans, so we are reluctant to give up the spoils of animal domination—meat, eggs, cheese, wool, fur and leather—and exchange them for tofu, pleather (plastic leather) and animal liberation.

In the face of this inertia, some have asked us to imagine ourselves in the position of the animals that we exploit and kill. Jonathan Safran Foer puts this in the form of an alien invasion in his anti-factory farming treatise, *Eating Animals* (2009):

If we were to one day encounter a form of life more powerful and intelligent than our own, and it regarded us as we regard fish, what would be our argument against being eaten?

Rhys Southan, “The Vegans Have Landed”. This essay was originally published in Aeon aeon.co

Suppose that we are doing our usual thing of exploiting animals because they aren't smart or powerful enough to fight back. An alien species that is smarter and more powerful than us lands on Earth and decides to follow our example by exploiting and killing us. Why shouldn't aliens use their technological and cerebral edge to turn us into food, clothes, entertainment and research subjects, just as we do to animals now?

This is, of course, a sci-fi repackaging of the "Golden Rule"—that is, one should treat others as one would like to be treated oneself. This argument resonates because most of us have picked up a version of "do as you would be done by" somewhere along the way. . . . Could it be, then, that if we want to be consistent with our own values, the animal activists are right that we need to go vegan?

We might object that there is something misleading about the alien scenario. It wants to make us see things from the animals' point of view, yet fudges it by putting us in the animals' place while maintaining our human cultural beliefs and cognitive abilities. There are certainly similarities between human and non-human experiences, especially when it comes to pain, but as with the Epsilons in Aldous Huxley's novel *Brave New World* (1932) who are genetically designed to tolerate a subservient existence, we assume that cows, pigs, lambs and chickens who are raised on farms and killed in slaughterhouses do not suffer the horror and existential anguish that humans would in the same circumstances. This is why the alien hypothetical is something of a cheat, and equally why comparing factory farms to the Holocaust and human slavery rings false.

Even so, if animals want to avoid suffering and want to live, as surely they do, using them as resources violates those interests. Given that humans cause animals so much suffering and death while offering them so little in return, there's no denying that for most other animals on this planet, we might as well be a malevolent invasion.

So, my objection to the alien invasion scenario is more sweeping. If we want to take the interests of animals seriously, then the biggest failure of the analogy is that it underestimates just how malign we are. Sure, if we were replaced as the dominant animals on the planet, we'd probably prefer the new ruling species to be vegan. But if aliens with superior technology and minds came here and were determined to treat us the way that vegan humans treat animals on this planet, we'd still be in serious trouble. Veganism would hardly figure as a safeguard of our wellbeing.

Universal veganism wouldn't stop the road-building, logging, urban and suburban development, pollution, resource

consumption, and other forms of land transformation that kills animals by the billions. So what does veganism do exactly? Theoretically, it ends the raising, capture and exploitation of living animals, and it stops a particular kind of killing that many vegans claim is the worst and least excusable: the intentional killing of animals in order to use their bodies as material goods.

Veganism, as a whole, requires us to stop using animals for entertainment, food, pharmaceutical testing, and clothing. If it were to become universal, factory farming and animal testing would end, which would be excellent news for all the animals that we capture or raise for these purposes. But it would accomplish next to nothing for free-roaming wild animals except to stop hunting, which is the least of their problems.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature in Switzerland, the world's first global environmental organisation, says:

Analyses of the data on threats to bird, mammal and amphibian species . . . show that the most pervasive threat that they face is habitat destruction and degradation driven by agricultural and forestry activities.

Animal agriculture is responsible for plenty of that, but is far from the only culprit. Purely arable farmers accidentally kill insects, snails, small mammals, and other animals with farm machinery, and they intentionally kill these animals with pesticides that often unintentionally go on to harm wildlife through drift and secondary poisonings. Farmers also allow hunters onto their land to reduce the populations of deer and other “pest” species that might eat their crops. Redirecting water for irrigation kills fish, as does spill-off from fertiliser and pesticides. We run over animals with our cars. We destroy animal habitats to build our cities, and we extract resources from areas that then become either uninhabitable or dangerous. The “wild land” that we do leave untouched is often fragmented into little bits that don't give animals the space they need to make homes and roam for food, and so cannot sustain them.

If our intergalactic superiors landed here, but had no interest in eating us or our fellow animals, the first thing they could do is rob our stores, homes, farms, and warehouses of all our fruits, vegetables, beans, grains, and vegan convenience products. Without violating any vegan principles there would be no limit to the amount of food vegan aliens could steal from us—vegan ethics allows for humans using all the plant matter they want in the world, no matter how many animals starve as a consequence. Aliens could cause the worst famine humanity has

ever seen, but it would be entirely compatible with vegan ethics. That's because it would all fall under the rubric of "good intent." They wouldn't be killing us deliberately to eat us, but rather because they wanted our food and had the power to take it—our starvation would be a foreseeable, yet accidental, side effect. We might try to fight the vegan invaders over this mass plunder, but then they could kill us outright for threatening their lives. That's because humans killing animals in self-defence is also no crime in veganism, even if we've wandered onto the animals' own territory.

Since veganism doesn't stop us from wrecking animal habitats to make space for ourselves, vegan aliens could knock down all our buildings to construct new ones that better fit their pangalactic design aesthetic. They could evict us from our homes, businesses and veganic farms without compensation, and then, to keep us from returning, they could set up fences, noise barriers and other humane deterrents. To them, we would be hungry pests who threaten their vegan food supply, so they might even be justified in trapping us or killing us with poisons if we got too close. Humans would now largely be without food and shelter, but the vegan aliens wouldn't need to lose sleep over it. . . .

Some vegan aliens might enjoy keeping a few human pets, naming us, cuddling us, and feeding us veggie treats. Even now, pet ownership is a controversial issue in animal rights, but most activists say that it's okay for vegans to keep some animals as dependents since they have been domesticated and, as a result, would suffer in the wild. Vegan aliens could justify keeping humans as pets for similar reasons if they saw that some of us couldn't make it on our own. That might be a pretty fair deal if the aliens were friendly and loving owners, but the downside is that they could spay and neuter us, as even People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals says vegans should spay and neuter their pets. Of course, the aliens would say this was for our own good, as we tend to overpopulate when left in charge of our own reproduction.

There's a chance that not all aliens would thrive on a plant-based diet. Some of the aliens might suffer from an unfortunate confluence of intolerances, allergies, digestive troubles, and medical conditions, or they could be living in harsh climates without enough plant material to sustain them. There could be any number of alien-centric conditions that made veganism too difficult for some of them. Vegan ethics makes exceptions in cases like this when a vegan diet just cannot work for some individuals, which means some of the aliens would be allowed

to eat meat for their health. For example, aliens with Smith-Lemli-Opitz Syndrome who can't produce enough of their own cholesterol might benefit from an external animal source. And aliens with epilepsy might need to be on a high-fat, low-carb ketogenic diet to control their seizures, but it would be nearly impossible for them to get the right balance of macronutrients without eating animals, especially if they also happened to be allergic to soy, gluten, and nuts.

So which animals would they kill for this purpose? Since the vegan aliens would claim to be anti-speciesist, it would be unjust discrimination for them to value the lives of humans over those of other animals such as deer, squirrels, pigeons, rabbit, or fish. So if the aliens couldn't tolerate soy, wheat, fructose, oxalates, or nuts, or if they lived somewhere without much in the way of vegan foods, they could eat us with a clear conscience.

. . . What the argument from alien invasion ultimately shows, then, is that humans cannot consistently apply the Golden Rule to the rest of the animal kingdom without going a lot further than vegans are asking us to go. Animal rights philosophers are positing a problem that might have no practical solution. Yes, nonhuman animals are thinking and feeling individuals who want to live, but attempting to correct the power imbalance between humans and other animals would require much more than humans giving up animal products. We would have to stop spaying and neutering animals, reverse our destruction and fragmentation of animal habitat, give up agriculture and civilisation, refuse to eat animals even when our wellbeing requires it, and become pacifist gatherers who never foraged food that other animals needed for themselves. Even then, other animals would have nothing to gain from our presence here.

The Golden Rule works for humans because it isn't necessarily a zero-sum game between us [humans]. . . . [But] everything we take is a loss for other animals. . . . We can give up some of the luxuries of domination for the sake of non-humans, but any sacrifices we make this side of human extinction are token compromises that selfishly maintain our fundamental position. Worldwide veganism wouldn't allow us to live in harmony with other animals—it's just one of those token compromises. No matter what ethical philosophy we hold on to, on the day that brilliant, powerful aliens invade our planet, we'd better hope that they don't try to be anything like us.



GOING FARTHER #12

CHILDREN'S LIBERATION?

Recent times have seen the repeated emergence of liberation movements whose central arguments are for the equality of some presently disempowered or devalued group in society. And a key argument for equality, as we have seen in Chapter 10, is often a “like cases” argument: that while there may be all manner of clear differences between the in-group and the out-group in question, there are no *morally relevant* differences between them (and probably less difference than we imagine in general, besides), and thus that those in the out-group are unjustly excluded from the rights and privileges that the in-group enjoys.

Such arguments are well established against racism, sexism, and ethnic prejudice—though of course all of these injustices still remain in our society to various degrees. “Marriage equality”—the right of same-sex couples to enjoy the same benefits of marriage as different-sex couples—was only affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2015. Meanwhile, as we have been seeing, one continuing moral question is whether and to what extent such arguments also apply beyond the human species—to our relations to all or some other animals.

Ironically, in light of this, the question is less often raised about children. Yet as a group, children certainly are systematically disempowered in our society. Parents or guardians are empowered to make almost all choices, large and small, for their children—where and how they shall live, dress, eat, go to school, who they associate with, what they do day to day—until the children reach the age of 18, at which point the former children are now recognized, literally overnight, as full-scale adults, and the choices are all theirs.

Even on purely factual grounds, though, this is surely not an accurate view. Obviously the capacity for reflective choice does not emerge full-blown overnight—it develops gradually. Quite young children may be highly capable of it, and motivated for it besides, and, alas, sometimes much older people may not develop it half as well. Isn't it arguably unjust to deny self-determination to anyone capable of it? And moreover to set up our society such that that capacity itself is often distorted and stunted, especially but not only in children? A more just society for children, then, might not just offer them more rights but also make a project of removing some of the dangers and challenges that today seem to necessitate such strict adult control in the first place.

The idea may seem easy to deride. Children's rights?—what, babies voting? But of course rights are still relative to basic needs and legitimate expectations. Let young people wait until their late teens to vote, maybe, but arguably everyone has a legitimate expectation of basic freedom of movement.

Liberation movements are often profoundly unsettling to those used to—and usually favored by—the status quo they challenge, and indeed often are not even comprehensible to the privileged, so routinely they are derided. Infamously, for example, Mary Wollstonecraft's arguments for the rights of women in 1792 were parodied by British conservatives who proposed to extend the same rights, by the same arguments, to “brutes” (other

animals). But today we are close to doing both: committed, at least in theory, to equality of women, and seriously thinking about other animals. What seemed unimaginable was entirely possible. So could not the idea of children's rights, however unimaginable it may seem to some of us today, be another wave of the future nonetheless?

READING 28

"Beyond Adulthood"

AMY GLASER

AMY GLASER (b. 1980) is completing a PhD in philosophy at the University of North Carolina–Chapel Hill focused on young people's rights and liberation, and is co-founder and Director of Insideout180, a youth-run organization for queer and allied youth in North Carolina as well as a caretaker, performance artist, and philosophy teacher at UNC–Chapel Hill and at Elon University.

Glaser's larger work develops a positive moral framework built upon "a consistent standard for determining the value of agency in people of all ages"—a large project indeed. The selection that follows simply addresses some familiar arguments that stand in the way of taking some children seriously as moral agents. Glaser is not arguing, remember, that all children should have exactly the same rights as adults, but that *many* children should have at least *some* such rights, on grounds of consistency and justice, and moreover that we can and should do much more to build a world in which children's autonomy can be affirmed and effectively and safely exercised.

Opponents of youth liberation (anti-liberationists) maintain that whereas adults have a right to do what they please (for the most part), since they are rationally autonomous—that is, capable of making sensible choices and effectively pursuing their own interests—children lack this right because they are incompetent to make choices. Children's developing capacities leave them unable to properly assess the outcomes of their decisions. They lack important areas of knowledge and expertise that adults have gained through experience, and they are subject to flitting desires, lacking the emotional stability that long-term, sensible decision-making requires. It is on these grounds that opponents of youth liberation seek to secure young people's inferior status and their subjection to adult control. *Anti-liberationists*

disvalue children's choices and agency relative to adults across the board by linking rational autonomy and a right to self-determination.

For one to have a right to self-determination means that one has the strongest kind of claim there is to make one's own choices, to move oneself about, unimpeded, in the world, or to act in accord with one's decisions. One's having a right to self-determination implies that one has a legitimate claim to have one's choices (all of one's choices) be effective, to be "left alone to do their own thing," or to "live their lives as they see fit." Self-determination is taken to be the appropriate default for adults; that is, it is supposed to be wrong (for the law or another person) to interfere with an adult's free choice except and to the extent that the choice may harm others.

Youth are not granted the same default. Since youth are taken to lack a right to freedom and self-determination, interfering with a young person's choice never constitutes a violation of their right to choose. On this picture, while a child may have some moral claim to choose, the claim is much less strong, less serious, less demanding, and less deserving of respect than a right.

I want to raise five problems for the anti-liberationist claim that because adults alone are rationally autonomous, adults have, and children lack, a right to self-determination.

The first problem is that the notion of a right to self-determination posits a twofold moral distinction, a type of moral watershed. Those who have passed over the watershed are seen as having a much stronger claim to do what they want to than those below it.

But rational autonomy develops gradually. We get gradually better at understanding the outcomes of our choices and more knowledgeable about our surroundings and one another. To attribute a right to self-determination only to individuals above a particular age is to posit some binary moral feature, one that we come to possess at a particular age or narrow age range. To pass from not having a right to having one is an abrupt and extremely significant moral transformation. But the changes taken to underlie this moral transformation are gradual, non-binary, sometimes even non-linear, subtle and insignificant. The non-moral changes do not conform to distinct, easily identifiable, binary categories. The extent to which the relevant capacities are exercised in a particular case may vary greatly from decision to decision, even for one person at a particular age. It is unjust to mark some moral distinction (the distinction between having a right to self-determination and not having one) when there is no underlying non-moral basis for that sharp distinction.

Second, and more importantly, rational autonomy, conceived in the traditional ways, is not always relevant to the moral status of one's choices. Consider a toddler resisting an unwanted hug.

The anti-liberationist who links rational autonomy with a right to self-determination must insist that an adult has a stronger claim to resist an unwanted hug than a toddler in the same circumstances. The anti-liberationist goes further to insist that the toddler and the adult's circumstances are never relevantly similar, since the adult is rationally autonomous and the toddler isn't, granting only the former a right to self-determine.

But rational autonomy is irrelevant to the legitimacy and force of an agent's claim to resist an unwanted hug. The notion of a claim is important here, since it allows us to recognize that one's freedom may be morally compelling, even when it lacks the full and prestigious moral status of a right. To have a claim to x means that there are some moral considerations that speak in favor of one's getting to x . Youth liberationists hold that youth and adults might have an equal claim to be able to x , despite that they may not be equally rationally autonomous. On this view, youth and adults are equal in the sense that the value of their agency ought to be determined by a single, consistent standard. When children and adults are in relevantly similar circumstances, their agency is equally valuable.

A third problem for opponents of youth liberation is a critique of rational autonomy issued by feminists, who argue that traditional conceptions of rational autonomy are male-biased and mistakenly view humans as essentially disconnected, self-sufficient, rational individuals who aim primarily at maximizing the satisfaction of their self-interests, even when it is admitted these aims can be tempered by acknowledgement of others' interests and of moral requirements of impartiality.

Central to the feminist critique are accusations that the traditional conceptions do not make room for communal values and for fulfillment that comes from caring for others. By setting traditional notions of independence, self-sufficiency, and autonomy as normative ideals, anti-liberationists ignore and devalue human interdependence and attempt to abstract persons from the particular relationship webs and social circumstances in which we develop. Feminists have held that such abstraction is not only empirically misguided, but logically impossible. Where opponents of youth liberation appoint individuals as the authorities on what constitutes the fulfillment of their own interests, feminists have considered ways in which one's desires and stated preferences may be *deformed* by oppression. For feminists, our common dependence on and relationships to particular others are not viewed as a liability, but as valuable features of our lives to be cultivated and promoted. At other times, our place in the social groups we comprise threatens

our autonomy by misshaping our values and desires or limiting our options.

In all of these accounts, the ideal agent is not disconnected and deliberative, but one whose freedom arises from being deeply embedded in a community and in loving, supportive, interdependent relationships, and from being attuned to the ways that one is influenced by one's social surroundings. Adults, as much as children, depend on these relationships for their wellbeing. The anti-liberationist's insistence that adult agency is more sacred than young people's because adults, unlike children, have reached a state of rational maturity falters partly because it is based on misconceptions of human fulfillment and societal ideals misshapen by an oppressive society.

A fourth problem for the anti-liberationist is recent empirical work that suggests that adults are less rational, and babies more rational, than previously thought. The illogicality of adult humans was demonstrated in the 1960s with Peter Wason's selection task, where he demonstrated normal adults' incapacity to fully grasp the basic logical rule of *modus ponens*. Hundreds of experiments since have picked up on the same themes. Social scientist Dan Ariely points to statistics that suggest that whether a country has a high rate of organ donors is determined by how its residents are presented with the option to become organ donors (whether they have to check a box on a form, or abstain from checking a box). That many of our "free choices" are fully determined by factors we don't actually care about shows that adults are not the hyper-rational, principled beings that we take ourselves to be. They question the presumption that there is a gulf between youth and adult rationality, in effect by "talking us down," from our perceived sovereign status. Research on human irrationality has consistently demonstrated that we are just not as rational as we take ourselves to be. The anti-liberationist view of ourselves as essentially rational creatures who are good at determining what's in our interest and then acting on it in principled ways is a form of self-deception.

At the same time as adult rationality is called into question by empirical studies, an emerging and rich body of research accuses us of understating the rational and moral capacities of babies and very young children. Babies have been shown to understand cause and effect, to empathize, to discern other people's cognitive states, and to grasp basic moral notions of justice and fairness, even before they are able to speak. They are better, faster learners. Children are natural experimenters; they have been shown to be more aware and more conscious of their surroundings, in the sense that they can take in more information at once, though they

are poorer than adults at focusing in on one particular stimulus. In one experiment, Alison Gopnik showed that 4-year-old children are actually better than adults at discovering an unlikely hypothesis to be true. She concludes on the basis of extensive research that to the extent that adults strive for open-mindedness, creativity, innovation, open learning, and imagination, we should learn to think *more* like children.

Very young children are better at authenticity, at expressing their true selves; they have been deemed better at abstract art and creativity; their imaginations are more vivid and exploratory. They have more energy, stamina, and resilience. These are genuine human skills, not just relegated to the realm of "child's play," but vital for human flourishing and for creating a world we all want to live in. Young people are constantly helping adults lighten up and see what's important. The most tightly wound adults come out of their shells in the presence of children. Children hold fewer grudges. They encourage their parents to stop smoking, to be more active and to get outside, and they are great at *loving* unconditionally. They are more willing to be vulnerable, to forgive, to say what they really think. In many ways, adults might be *better*, more fulfilled choice makers if we let ourselves be inspired by children more often, if we were all a bit more childlike. These are all reasons for thinking that children have a stronger claim to agency than they are traditionally granted.

That children might even be better than adults at agency in some contexts is not the only reason to think that sometimes children have an equal or stronger claim to self-determination than adults. A fifth and final problem for the anti-liberationist is that sometimes lacking a capacity, a form of incompetence, enhances the value of freedom, strengthening one's moral claim to self-determine.

For a toddler learning to walk, every freely taken step is significant. If it is important for adults to have spaces that they can safely and successfully navigate, it is even more important for toddlers. And the best way to get better at making decisions is to practice making them. Children whose agency is respected and equally valued get more practice exercising the executive functions of their brains. Recognizing a child's legitimate claim to, say, walk across the room and pick up a toy, and giving them the space to do so, strengthens the muscles required for choice making, generally. Freedom to make smaller-scale choices has important consequences as the child's attention gradually shifts to larger-scale, more significant choices. To deny someone the right to try to make

a choice on the grounds that they cannot make that choice stunts their growth by depriving them the opportunity to develop the relevant capacities through practice.

. . . The anti-liberationist, by drawing a single line intended to relegate the choices of people below a certain age to an inferior moral tier, contributes to a broader system that results in harm to young people and presents barriers to their personal wellbeing and fulfillment. Children's participation in their lives and the world is not only seen as morally inferior to adult participation, it is regularly discounted and actively excluded. Children are overlooked in conversation, they are spoken *at* instead of *to*, and their interests are routinely ignored. Undoing this oppressive system requires recognizing the equality of young people, demanding a consistent standard for determining the value of agency in people of all ages. Once we do, we'll see that at times, young people's unique assets magnify the value of their agency and strengthen their corresponding claim to be active participants in their lives and our collective lives.



Dialogue

As we begin to explore ethical issues with others, much of our actual day-to-day or class-to-class practice is *talking*. Judging by the usual ethical debates, though, our ways of talking about ethics could use some improvement. How can we talk more constructively with each other about ethical issues?

HOW TO HAVE A FRUITLESS DEBATE

A meets B in the cafeteria line, one thing leads to another, and a familiar kind of verbal fistfight begins.

- A:** Eating meat is natural! Humans have always done it. I wish all you vegetarians would get off my back. You want to go against nature.
- B:** Oh right, I suppose people have always lined up at McDonald's for their quarter-pounder with shake and fries.
- A:** Well, what do you want, to line up at some juice bar for your little organic carrot with spring water? Give me a break! Besides, you animal rights fanatics want to stop all medical research. What about the cures for so many diseases, found through experiments on animals? If it weren't for those experiments, you wouldn't even be here to bad-mouth them.
- B:** Why do we need all those new cosmetics and toilet bowl cleaners? That's what 99% of animal testing is about! You're just rationalizing torture.
- A:** I bet you don't even like pets. You're telling me I don't love my dog?
- B:** You think that your dog wants to live stuck in some tiny little apartment all day? You call it "love" when you pen up a dog? Talk about unnatural!!

And so it goes—a fruitless debate, but sure loud enough. This one is only slightly exaggerated from the kinds of real-life debates we have all the time. Each side aims primarily to shut the other side up, to put them down

in their own eyes and the eyes of anyone who may be listening. Potentially helpful points come up, but they are immediately dropped like hot potatoes. The actual arguments don't connect.

If put-downs and "winning" are your goals, you may deliberately try to create such debates. We could even spell out some of the "rules" both sides seem to be following. One is:

- **Take All the Room You Can.** Talk *loud* and talk a lot. Fill all the space you can with *your* thoughts and opinions. Worry about your *comeback*. Restate your opinion. Restate your opinion. Restate your opinion. Use a lot of "I think that . . ." statements. After the other person is done, come right back with "Yeah, but . . ."

In this debate, neither person really listens or tries to understand what the other person is saying. They're angry; they have a lot to say on the subject; they cannot wait to jump back in with some new peeve or assertion. If one side raises a good point, the other one would not think of acknowledging it or trying to respond. Neither is willing to give an inch. Apparently the best defense instead is just to change the subject. Having a comeback is everything.

Second:

- **Separate and Polarize.** *Polarize*: that is, exaggerate differences. Emphasize what you and the other side disagree about. Define their view as simply the opposite of yours. Always assume the worst. *Stereotype* the other side ("You're just a . . ."). Use *black/white labels* ("pro-life," "pro-death"). Try to define the other side before they can define themselves. Make your stereotyped labels stick.

In this debate, it's either all medical research or none; either a quarter-pounder or carrot sticks for lunch. No space for possible agreement is explored, no shared values are acknowledged or sought. Polarizing in this way reinforces the put-downs generally: the other side is made to look silly and stupid by constant exaggeration, as if they could not be in favor of anything sensible or balanced. Again there is no attempt to understand what the other person might actually mean. Instead the worst is assumed, and then attacked and mocked.

Finally, two related further "rules":

- **Exploit All Weaknesses or Openings.** Take *potshots*. Follow "red herrings." Pounce on any small discrepancies or other difficulties; don't engage the main point. *Run down partial solutions*. If an idea is not a perfect solution, attack it as no solution at all. Protect yourself by avoiding constructive thinking or making suggestions. Always be *against* something rather than *for* something.

- **Go for the Quick Kill.** Talk in *slogans* and *sound bites*. You'll infuriate the other side and everyone will remember your brilliant pithiness. Use facts only as weapons. Only seek out the ones that support your side; deny and suppress any others. Disengage quickly once you have secured an advantage. Demand *closure*; expect "final" answers; pull out as soon as you can claim you're "right."

In this debate, slogans and labels abound (like "you animal rights fanatics"), and all sorts of assumptions are made with no thought of checking them out to see whether they're true or not. Does B really know that A's dog is penned up all day? Does A really know what B thinks about medical research? No—they just make an assumption and blast away.

The whole debate is a series of potshots and changes of subject. Often the comeback is on a subject different from the one just being discussed. They start out talking about meat eating, then about medical research, then about pets. A's opening claim is mostly about whether eating meat is natural. B responds in a sarcastic way, though she does have an argument of sorts. Not surprisingly, A in turn responds chiefly to the sarcasm, derides what he *assumes* to be B's alternative—and then changes the subject to medical research. . . .

WELL, WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT?

Debaters know these "rules" and use them often. For some purposes they may even be useful. For other purposes it is at least useful to know about them: they may help you fight back or avoid getting caught in such a debate in the first place.

But—obviously—these "rules" do *not* work well when we are trying to think constructively about a problem. For one thing, they are ineffective, at least at persuasion. They don't really persuade—they only dominate and silence. The "loser" in such debates goes away angry, frustrated, maybe self-blaming—and certainly not feeling understood.

Second, they don't expand or develop ideas. They give us no way of cooperatively improving an idea. Quite the contrary: since the whole aim is to gain some personal advantage from criticizing any weakness in the other side's ideas, putting forward any kind of proposal is the last thing these rules encourage. Tentativeness, hope, enough trust to take up a rough idea and brainstorm together: this is just what these "rules" *prevent*.

In short, debate in this key drives people apart; it does not promote understanding; and at bottom *it is not ethical itself*. It is not committed to listening, open-mindedness, cooperation, and careful and responsible attention to values or arguments or concepts. It is not a sustaining mode of relationship, to recall Martin Fowler's useful term (Reading 24). We need to find another way.

HOW TO HAVE A USEFUL DISCUSSION

Now imagine a dialogue on the same subject in exactly the opposite key: listening carefully, respecting the other side, hoping to learn something and perhaps even to change your own ways as a result. Not mere acceptance (“Well, whatever . . .”), which leads to no dialogue and no learning at all. No: a real discussion, even disagreement, but in a constructive key. How would the discussion go then?

Rewind the tape. A meets B in the cafeteria line, and the debate begins again.

- A:** Eating meat is natural! Humans have always done it. I wish all you vegetarians would get off my back. You want to go against nature.

In the very first place, a good listener would notice the defensiveness in this statement, “I wish all you vegetarians would get off my back.” It seems that more is at stake for A than just a disagreement about the facts. Real people enter debates with baggage, after all; certainly A does in this case, and very likely B does too, though less obviously. You might guess that A has felt put on the spot, or put down, for eating meat. You could easily predict, too, that A will therefore find it hard to hear and acknowledge even the best arguments against meat eating. So although B’s first impulse seems to be to mock A’s argument and put her down even more cleverly, this is exactly the wrong strategy. Better to deal with the anger before taking up any arguments at all.

- B:** So someone’s been on your case, eh? Sorry about that. For my part, I’m really not interested in playing guilt games, though I know it happens with subjects like this . . .

B’s response in the original dialogue does raise an important point. But B should raise this point in a way that is clearer and (obviously) not sarcastic. In the original, remember, after A says that eating meat is natural and that humans have always done it, B responds:

- ~~**B:** Oh right, I suppose people have always lined up at McDonald’s for their quarter-pounder with shake and fries.~~

(I will put a line through the unconstructive responses to distinguish them clearly from the alternatives that follow.)

B may be thinking that humans may *not* always have eaten meat, at least in the way we do now. Generalizations about what has “always happened” are often made in a pretty offhand way, more as a rationalization than anything else. Is this what B suspects? If so, B could respond a lot more constructively by asking a question, for example.

- B:** I'm not so sure that people have always eaten meat. We're not built for it, biologically: Our teeth are the munching sort, not the tearing teeth of real carnivores. At least, I doubt that humans ate so much meat as we do now. What kind of diet do you think humans evolved with?

Now consider the next exchange. In the original, A mocks B's point in turn, and then goes on to something else. Remember:

- A:** ~~Well, what do you want, to line up at some juice bar for your little organic carrot with spring water? Give me a break! Besides, you animal rights fanatics want to stop all medical research. What about the cures for so many diseases, found through experiments on animals? If it weren't for those experiments, you wouldn't even be here to bad-mouth them.~~

My students, analyzing this exchange, point out (1) it would be more useful for A to ask B what kind of diet he actually proposes, rather than respond to the sarcasm with more of the same; (2) A should stay on the subject (the naturalness of meat eating) rather than shift to something else; and (3) A should *ask* B what he thinks about medical research rather than assuming he's against all of it. Suppose A said:

- A:** I'm pretty sure our ancestors ate meat when they could get it, though you might be right that it wasn't very often. But I'm interested in what you propose instead. Eating no meat at all, ever? What about people who need to eat meat to survive in their environments, like the Inuit? This also makes me think of the debate about using animals in medical research. Are you also opposed to that? Always?

These are good questions and once again have the effect of opening up a thoughtful discussion rather than closing the talk down into "comebacks." Notice also that A no longer assumes that B must hold the most extreme possible position. Instead, she *asks* B what he thinks—and raises the question for B himself of just how far he will go.

B in turn can respond in a more constructive way.

- B:** Probably many people did eat meat when they could get it. And yes, maybe some people have to. But *we* don't have to. My real point is that it's not exactly natural to eat meat like we eat meat, anyway. Not meat at every meal, and the fattiest meat at that!

A has helped B to get to his *real* point—now we are getting somewhere!

Notice that in his original response, B never answers the question about medical research: he talks only about product testing.

~~B: Why do we need all those new cosmetics and toilet bowl cleaners? That's what 99% of animal testing is about! You're just rationalizing torture.~~

He might now be able to answer that part of A's question more thoughtfully too:

B: I'm troubled by how much pain animals are put through for even the most minimal human gain. What right do we have to do that to animals even if there is a gain for us? This relates to the question of product testing too. If some new kind of shampoo, or cosmetic, or cleaner can only be brought out if it is tested on animals, then maybe it just shouldn't be brought out. We shouldn't be causing so much suffering when we don't have to.

This last discussion is in place of B's passing remark in the original debate about "torture." No longer is it merely a passing remark. Now it opens up new aspects of the issue to explore.

Notice how shared values begin to come into view. For example, A is unlikely to think that unnecessary suffering is morally acceptable. She does not want to be responsible for imposing needless suffering on animals. This is why many people have stopped eating veal, even though they may eat other animals and use animal products. A would probably argue that in other cases the suffering isn't needless—that in some way it is necessary—or that the animals don't really suffer so much. In any case, this is now a constructive discussion, and it is beginning to sound like ethics in a more familiar sense: trying to spell out and apply shared values. It's a mutual exploration, no longer a fight.

RULES FOR CONSTRUCTIVE TALKING

Ethical dialogue *could* be like this. All it takes is some skills that are not even so difficult. None of the advice in the last few pages, I trust, has been some shocking new revelation. All of the skills, and the possibilities they open up, are familiar. We just need to learn how to put them into practice at the right times.

Earlier we spelled out "rules" for fruitless debates. We can now spell out four corresponding rules for constructive talking—your ground rules for ethical discussions.

- **Slow Down and Listen.** Speak *calmly* and listen a lot. *Avoid the automatic comeback.* If you find yourself too ready with the "Yeah, but . . .", stop and take a deep breath. Then say, "Let me see if I understand you. . . ." Watch the surprise (and appreciation). And work for better *understanding*.

Ask questions, and mean them. Restate others' views to make sure you "get it"—later you can ask for the same consideration back. Expect that you have as much to learn as they do.

In the revised dialogue, instead of taking all the room they can, A and B actually show some interest in each other's views and take the time to try to understand each other. They try to put their points carefully, admit uncertainty, and identify conflict without escalating it.

- **Connect.** Seek *common ground*. Approach differences against a background of probable agreement. (Differences may emerge as interesting against this background. They certainly emerge as *bridgeable*.) Recognize complexity on the other side (and yours). Don't polarize. There are no simple "yes" and "no" positions. Keep the focus on the *main points*. You might even help other people clarify and develop their thoughts and avoid distraction.

In the revised version, A and B are not preoccupied with their differences but explore them carefully while also identifying key points of agreement. They try to "bring values into congruence," recognizing that each side speaks for something important. It's up to us to figure out what it is.

Finally, two more related rules:

- **Welcome Openings and Opportunities.** Look for first steps and partial measures. No problem is going to be resolved all at once. Think constructively; make suggestions. Always be *for* something and not just *against* something.
- **Stay Engaged.** Think of discussion as a collaboration in search of better understanding and creative ideas. Try to speak in a careful, open-ended, and helpful way. Avoid slogans or sound bites. Treat facts as *tools*. They're probably also more ambiguous than either side makes it seem. Keep exploring and looking for them. Expect the key questions to remain *open*. There is always more learning to do; the discussion will continue.

Instead of taking potshots and seeking to disengage the moment they have an advantage, A and B now take a much more exploratory approach and don't imagine that they are going to settle things once and for all. And therefore, oddly enough, they actually get much further than the debaters for whom finding a final and "right" position, right now, is everything. Debaters lock themselves into their positions and cannot budge. Collaborators, interested in a constructive discussion and making at least *some* difference, can *move*.

And notice finally, as I have been insisting throughout, that these are *ethical* rules too. Unlike the first set of rules, these rules reflect a commitment to listening, cooperation, and careful attention to values, arguments, and concepts—to sustaining arguments. They offer a way to talk about ethical issues that is itself ethical.

DIALOGUE UNDER DURESS

Dialogue sounds wonderful in theory. But what if you are talking with someone who is not interested in dialogue? Or someone who does not know how to have one, or does not trust you or the situation enough to listen or believe they will be listened to?

Don't Give Up Too Soon

Too often, ethical discussions reduce to fruitless debates because some of the participants have no idea that there is any other way to talk—or, even if they do, they don't trust anyone else to try it.

In that case, clearly the thing to do is to try it. Create an alternative. Set alternative ground rules for discussion, such as the Common Ground Rules in the reading to follow. Anyone who thinks that debate is the only way will be pleasantly surprised—and so will you, when people who appeared to be interested only in debate turn out to prefer something else, once given a real choice. The point is that *you* may have to be the one who creates that choice—you may have to set the alternative ground rules, formally and explicitly or gently by example. *You do not simply have to accept whatever kind of discussion you find yourself stuck in.*

Even habitual complainers can be lured onto more constructive ground. To the people whose main mode of discussion seems to be constant criticism and complaining, ask, “So, what’s *your* idea?” Show some interest. Carping is usually an attractive strategy because carpers can avoid sticking their necks out by making positive suggestions. So make positive suggestions safer. Create a setting in which creativity and openness are rewarded and carping is not.

Resisters

Some people just *love* to argue—so much so that they do not even notice, and certainly do not respond to, invitations to dialogue. They automatically turn any discussion into a debate.

You can leave this kind of discussion. You are not obliged to keep trying dialogue forever. Usually you can pull out in a way that isn’t “losing,” but just refusing to play the game.

You might also challenge the debate rules. Point out what is happening, and ask your partner or the group if this is really how they want to proceed. This is uncomfortable, of course, and not subtle at all. But it may sometimes work. At least it keeps people from falling into debate as if it were the only possible way to discuss things.

Some people enter dialogue in bad faith. People may use dialogue as a means of stalling. The idea might be to talk an issue to death so that nothing really changes—an appealing option for those who like things the way they are. So you need to be sure that all parties to the dialogue enter it with some good faith. If they don't, you are again entitled to pull out.

Or stay but refuse to play along. You might still make some progress. Stallers may find it hard to keep up polarizing values and grandstanding when you are speaking carefully and in general refusing to “play debate.” Try it: it can actually be fun. If you have low expectations, at least you won't be disappointed.

Some people may join a dialogue (or may have to, for example, in a classroom) but be unwilling to speak honestly and openly in it. I have seen students in discussions of homophobia or racism or other kinds of prejudice unwilling to express views they actually hold, especially if they fear seeming prejudiced. But then many useful questions never get asked, stereotypes never get addressed, and some people leave feeling oppressed by a general atmosphere of “correctness.”

On the other hand, sometimes students who are members of historically oppressed groups may be silent because they fear having their identities exposed or spotlighted, feeling vulnerable to attack or to being labeled as whining or complaining or campaigning for special consideration.

Good facilitation can help. The teacher or group leader may need to name the stereotypes, so at least they are out on the table. You may need as well to explicitly acknowledge the reasons that some people may be reluctant to speak up. Still, there are ways to do so. Find a story or movie whose characters bring them up, so the class or group can discuss them in the third person. Encourage others to bring up views in the third person too, as in, “Someone might say that . . .” or “It's not my view, but. . .”

Silencing

Some people go into dialogue easily and feel welcomed and rewarded. Others come into the same space disadvantaged and with well-established habits of deference and silence. The results are very uneven patterns of participation and influence.

Usually the advantaged ones, though, are blissfully unaware of this imbalance—it's just “the way things are,” to them—and if it is brought up by the disadvantaged (who are generally *quite* aware of it), the reaction is typically denial and anger. So, naturally, it is seldom brought up. Things just go on as before.

Still, dialogue fails when only some members of a group do all the talking: only men in gender-mixed groups, only whites in racially mixed groups,

only teachers when teachers and students are together. Phyllis Beck Kritek, a nurse-administrator experienced at “negotiating at an uneven table,” gives another example:

I once served on a statewide committee looking at maldistribution of health care services. . . . There were several Native American reservations in this state. Health care needs on these reservations were profound. Historically, these needs had been easily rendered invisible. . . . An honest effort was made to change this pattern, to invite representatives from the tribal councils to the table. They attended the first organizational meeting.

The tribal councils, of course, had a well-developed model for deliberating on conflicts: requesting all parties to speak their minds on the issue one by one and uninterrupted, in a deliberative fashion; consulting the elders; seeking guidance from spirits . . . ; reflection. The approach to conflict offered by the statewide committee was open discussion and political posturing, a tug of war between competing agendas. The tribal representatives sat silently watching, saying nothing. Later one participant commented to me privately that the American Indians were sure not going to get their fair share if they didn’t participate better. No one asked them to speak their mind during this time. They would only have had the opportunity to speak if they had chosen to participate in the competition for airtime. At the second meeting, they were absent.

If You Feel Silenced

When you find yourself silenced or disadvantaged, here are some suggestions.

For one thing, again, don’t assume that you must play the game by the prevailing rules. Maybe the prevailing rules are the *problem*. You might try to bring up this problem directly, or you might try to subvert the rules in a less direct way. For example, if the advantage of others is sustained partly by a distinctive language or jargon, request translations. Use your own language sometimes and translate for others. As Kritek says, this at least “highlights the inequity structured into the negotiation that requires you to sit at an uneven table speaking someone else’s language.” Make things more complicated—you can do it.

Democratic talk needn’t be the kind of “free-for-all” that Kritek describes. There are many other traditions and styles of dialogue. Native Americans often used a “talking stick,” giving the holder an uninterrupted “floor,” passed around to everyone in turn so that each voice could be heard and each voice had its “space.” Try it. At least, if debate is not a style that you can even enter, ask for a different kind of hearing from your group. If they care to hear you out, they will agree (or at least discuss it). If they don’t,

then at least you know where you stand—and they will have to admit where *they* stand.

Classroom settings can be changed too. Talk to your instructor; find a way to raise the issue for the class. In a class that uses this book, call on this chapter.

It may also be helpful to seek to establish solidarity with others who seem to be similarly disadvantaged. Speak to others outside of the large-group setting about their experience of the group to generate a discussion that feels safe and welcoming on a small scale, then together bring it back to the full group.

When You Are Advantaged

Suppose you are one of the advantaged. Others may be feeling silenced, but not you: you might even be feeling quite expansive.

Your job first of all is to recognize the problem. Advantage is usually invisible to the advantaged because the space of dialogue does not seem constrained to *them*. It is easy to enter when you know you will be listened to and taken seriously. It is hard to imagine that others could feel any differently. “Well, why don’t they just *talk*?”

But of course it is not so simple from the other side. It may help to remember those times that *you* felt intimidated from saying anything, or that no one would really listen or care anyway. Recognize now that others may feel the same way in a discussion that feels entirely open and natural to you.

Second, raise the problem with your group as a whole. Point out the unequal pattern of participation. State as directly and honestly as you can *your* interest in hearing from those who have been silent. Ask on behalf of the group (step up to leadership here) in what ways the group can change so as to lessen the barriers to participation that others may be feeling. Maybe you need a talking stick? Maybe . . . ?

Once again, the challenge may be to *you* to move yourself—and to move *first*. You may have to disrupt and challenge familiar and comfortable ways (to you, anyway) and make things more difficult. It can take some courage—but remember, more constructive dialogues *are* possible, and sometimes are surprisingly easy once someone makes a move in their direction. On the other hand, there may also be dialogues that you conclude aren’t possible right now. Trust must first be built in other ways, maybe; or some other kind of institutional or personal change is necessary first. Things don’t get easier! But they might, slowly, get better.

READING 29

“Common Ground Rules”

MARY JACKSTEIT AND ADRIENNE KAUFMANN,
THE COMMON GROUND NETWORK FOR LIFE AND CHOICE

THE COMMON GROUND Network for Life and Choice worked from 1993 to 2000 to bring together activists from opposing sides in the abortion conflict in the hopes of creating real dialogue, understanding each other better, and finding common ground that the two sides could build upon together, rather than frustrating each other's every move. The reading that follows comes from the group's manual *Finding Common Ground in the Abortion Conflict*, by Mary Jacksteit and Adrienne Kaufmann, published by the Common Ground Network (1601 Connecticut Avenue NW, Washington, DC, 20009) in January 1995. The “spirit of common ground,” they say, is dialogue—a good in its own right as well as a precondition for actually working together to promote shared goals.

The organization that sponsored the Network in turn, and produced this manual, is called Search for Common Ground (SFCG). The Common Ground Network for Life and Choice was SFCG's first project in the United States. Six projects in the United States have now been completed, with four others ongoing, as well as an impressive number of international projects, all using the same basic approach. For more information on all of these projects, as well as a downloadable version of the manual excerpted here, see www.sfcg.org/programmes.

WHAT IS THE COMMON GROUND APPROACH?

For many people the idea of searching for common ground in the abortion conflict is strange and unbelievable—even unthinkable. Some people can only imagine that you are inviting them to engage in an activity in which they will have to “compromise” their values and beliefs. Viewing the conflict as a black or white contest to see which “side” will “win,” the only alternative they can envision is the creation of some shade of gray in which their values and concerns are diluted and diminished. For some, the idea of any conversation with “Them” is dismissed as an act of betrayal.

Because the very idea of “common ground” in the abortion conflict is foreign and radical to many people in this society, we are

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offering a variety of approaches to answering the frequently asked questions “what do you mean by common ground?” and “what is the common ground approach?”

THE SPIRIT OF COMMON GROUND IS THE SPIRIT OF DIALOGUE

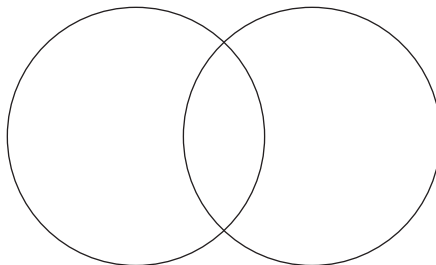
The practice of dialogue lies at the heart of the common ground approach. Dialogue is different from debate. Debate is about persuading others that your views are “right” and that the views of others are “wrong.” Debate tends to create winners and losers and often leads to pain and divisiveness when the subject is sensitive and people’s views are as heart-felt as they tend to be on the issue of abortion.

Dialogue is a gentler, more respectful process than debate. The spirit of dialogue is to acknowledge and honor the humanity of *all* persons present regardless of their points of view. The goals of dialogue center around increasing understanding and being understood rather than persuading others and being “right.”

When dialogue is attempted in a sustained and polarized conflict, a primary goal is to change the relationship between those who see each other as demonized adversaries. When an issue is explosive and relationships are already highly strained, dialogue is more likely than debate to lead to understanding and trust. A carefully constructed dialogue process can enable hard issues to be addressed without leading to bad feelings.

THE COMMON GROUND APPROACH IS A SEARCH FOR WHAT IS GENUINELY SHARED

The idea of common ground can be illustrated by two interlocking circles. Each circle represents a point of view about abortion (one circle, pro-life; the other, pro-choice). A common ground process recognizes the integrity of each circle as a complete set of concerns, beliefs, and values around this issue. A common ground process primarily focuses attention on and explores the *area of intersection*. Through the search for concerns, beliefs, and values that are *shared*, a platform of understanding is built.



When participants stand together in the area of genuine intersection, they can also look at their *differences* with fresh eyes. The differences remain the same as before, but the perspective on these differences has changed. The angle of vision is from the common space looking out, instead of from the areas of difference where adversaries glare at one another across the submerged and unseen area of what is shared.

COMMON GROUND IS NOT COMPROMISE

Searching for common ground is not about compromising to reach a middle position but about focusing on areas of *genuinely* shared values and concerns. People are not asked to change their views on abortion or sacrifice their integrity. Participants in a common ground process seek to understand one another, not to force or pretend agreement where it does not exist.

A COMMON GROUND APPROACH ENCOURAGES LOOKING BEYOND THE LABELS AND THE STEREOTYPES

A common ground approach assumes that even in a polarized conflict, people's views fall on a continuum.

Pro-life _____ | _____ *Pro-choice*

When people identify themselves as “pro-choice” or “pro-life,” they are only placing themselves *somewhere* on the continuum other than the exact center.

The idea of a continuum encourages awareness of how little we can assume about another person's set of beliefs if all we know about them is that they choose one label over the other. It opens us to look for diversity on both sides, and to imagine that two given people with different labels may be as similar as two other people with the same label. It fosters curiosity about the views of the particular individuals on the “other side” encountered within a common ground approach.

A COMMON GROUND APPROACH ENCOURAGES CONNECTIVE THINKING

Debates tend to focus attention on the weaknesses of a speaker and to encourage a search for the flaws in what is said. Dialogue encourages *connective thinking* that focuses attention on the *strengths*

of the speaker and encourages a search for the gems of wisdom, or pieces of truth, in what is said. Over time, the practice of connective thinking in a group can lead to the creation of a web of shared knowledge woven from the threads of truth contributed by its members. Connective thinking fosters the building of constructive relationships and the development of community because it ties together the best wisdom of each member of the group. It is an important practice in the search for common ground.

A COMMON GROUND DIALOGUE ENCOURAGES THE SHARING OF PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

A common ground dialogue usually begins with the sharing of personal experiences. Life has been experienced by each person in a unique way. Personal experiences cannot be argued about nor agreed or disagreed with. They *are*. Sharing life stories invites understanding responses from those who hear them. They are a constructive place to begin.

A COMMON GROUND DIALOGUE ENCOURAGES GENUINE QUESTIONS

Genuine questions are questions asked in a spirit of real curiosity and a sincere interest in hearing the answers. Rhetorical or leading questions are **not** genuine questions. They are questions for which we already know the answers. We usually ask them not to learn but to test or trap someone whom we view as an opponent. The posing of genuine questions and the omission of all other kinds is a trademark of common ground dialogue.

THE SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND ACKNOWLEDGES OUR SHARED MEMBERSHIP IN THIS SOCIETY

Common ground involves acknowledging the connections that exist between people related to one another by shared community, faith, and/or citizenship. This approach can allow us to see how we are all affected by stressful and troubling circumstances in the larger social environment. It can enable participants to relate to one another as “all of us against the problems we face” rather than “part of us against the rest of us.”

ANSWERS TO FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

In this section we offer ingredients for answers to questions that are frequently asked of us or members of the Network.

WHY DO PEOPLE GET INVOLVED IN COMMON GROUND?

People have become involved in common ground activities for a variety of reasons. Prominent among those reasons are desires to promote a civil democratic society, effective problem-solving on important social issues, and peace. More specific motives frequently offered include:

- A belief that the level of confrontation over abortion is “out of hand” and destructive.
- A perception that the conflict is getting in the way of needed social change and is not helping the powerless and disadvantaged.
- The sense that the tone of the conflict is uncomfortably “out of sync” with personal systems of beliefs.
- A painful experience of division—division between people of faith, between women, between family members, between community members—and a belief in reconciliation, reconnection, and the need for people to learn to live in community despite serious differences.

WHAT FRAME OF MIND DOES IT TAKE TO “SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND”?

Not everyone is willing or able to join in the search for common ground at the moment they are invited to do so. Ideally, a person participating in common ground brings:

- A willingness to respect a human being who disagrees with you on the abortion issue and pledges to respect you in turn.
- An ability to listen to statements and views with which you strongly disagree without trying to convert those on the “other side” to your way of thinking and without feeling compromised by the act of listening.
- A belief in the importance of finding out what each person knows and understands about an issue.
- A desire to meet the human beings behind the stereotypes and media images.
- An openness to the unexpected, to the potential of “connecting” with an “adversary.”
- A belief that conflict can be a positive opportunity for growth and understanding.
- An ability to handle skepticism and criticism from people on one’s “own side” who view common ground as compromise and a dangerous way of conferring legitimacy on the “enemy.”

Few people have all these qualities fully or equally developed when they enter into a common ground process. What is essential is that participants be committed to respecting the ground rules that govern the dialogue process.

WHAT SORT OF PEOPLE ARE INTERESTED IN COMMON GROUND?

- Women and men, of different ages and different backgrounds, in widely separate parts of the country.
- Catholic and Protestant Christians, Jews, people of all faiths and those who have no religious orientation.
- Committed and active advocates on the abortion issue.
- People who have a position on abortion but are not activists, and people who feel “in the middle” on this issue.

WHAT ARE PEOPLE ACTUALLY DOING?

Around the country, pro-life and pro-choice people in local communities are coming together in a number of different ways—in small informal groups, in workshops, in structured dialogues with facilitators, in retreats, in joint endeavors to solve real problems. To date, efforts to find common ground on abortion have been happening primarily at the grassroots level where people are trying to create community at a face-to-face level. This is a “bottom-up” change in the dynamics of the conflict.

HOW DO PEOPLE SEARCH FOR COMMON GROUND ON ABORTION?

- They set aside generalities and rhetoric.
 - They meet and talk within a framework of ground rules based on a willingness to listen, to speak with respect, and to keep what is said confidential.
 - They speak as individuals, not as representatives of advocacy organizations.
 - They share personal experiences and beliefs about abortion.
 - They explore areas of common concern as well as difference.
 - They confront the stereotypes, perceptions, and misperceptions that people on each side hold about those on the other.
 - They may organize to work on a specific project or issue of mutual concern.
-

READING 30

“Deepening Ethical Dialogue”

SPOMA JOVANOVIĆ

SPOMA JOVANOVIĆ (b. 1958) is Professor of Communication Studies at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She has published widely on communicative ethics, particularly on community dialogue in Truth and Reconciliation processes in Greensboro and elsewhere.

The “ethics” part of “communicative ethics” reminds us right away that the attitudes underlying constructive dialogue—care for each other, willingness to listen and learn, an openness to the other as another center of awareness, in short as a *person*—are fundamental to ethics itself. So viewed, dialogue is an expression of the Ethics of the Person, with connections to the Ethics of Relationship as well. Dialogue about ethical issues, then, is not just about ethics: it also is ethics itself in action.

But communicative ethics also goes farther. As Jovanovic puts the central idea:

Speaking involves far more than stringing together a series of words. . . . Speaking is [also] an ethical act that entails verbalizing our values, feelings, thoughts, and passions. We communicate through words, tone, and action not only our thoughts or ideas but also our ethical relationship to others. Our speech communicates our personal obligations, position of power, interest in fairness, displays of care, and ongoing expectations.

Watch as these themes unfold in the following essay, written originally for the second edition of this textbook.

DEEPENING ETHICAL DIALOGUE

Speech is a move to extend ourselves to another human being, and in doing so our talk becomes a way to *put a voice to ethics*. Put another way, we often think of speech as just an individual behavior that translates our thoughts into words. But upon closer reflection it becomes clear that because our speech is directed at another person, it is inherently value laden.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In fact, even to speak to another person at all is an important form of acknowledgment that we live among others who are deserving

of our attention and care—as we are of theirs. Communication philosopher Michael Hyde poses a most interesting question, “What would life be like if no one acknowledged your existence?” You can imagine the isolation, fear, and anger that might mount under such conditions. Indeed, acknowledgment creates the space for others to enter our lives, and in doing so welcomes others to continue the conversation we start. As such, acknowledgment is an ethical move that oftentimes begins with a simple but earnest, “How are you?” or “Here I am!” in response to another’s call.

Acknowledgment is powerful. When it is offered in positive ways, a more caring relationship between people develops. When it is offered with negative intent in some forms as sarcasm, insults, or disrespect, it has the effect of making people feel bad, unloved, and unworthy. Because we have a choice to make as we encounter friends and strangers, acknowledgment is a way to communicate our ethical posture.

FROM MONOLOGUE TO DIALOGUE

Speech is ethical when it appreciates the value of another, is spoken in a way to create new meaning, and is genuine in its expression. This special form of speech is what philosophers and communication experts refer to as *dialogue*. Following the ideas offered by Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas, as well as the concepts taken from philosophers Mikhail Bakhtin and Hans Georg Gadamer, the theme of dialogue has over time achieved a mark of distinction in the study of communication. This is because dialogue engages another fully with a spirit of support, as contrasted to argument, which tends to encourage competitive behavior with the goal of beating the other in a reasoning game. Dialogue invites a sense of community by speaking to the other person where he or she is, as distinguished from monologue, which tends to create distance among people who are primarily concerned with their own individual agendas. Dialogue targets honest, heart-felt communication with another, with unconditional regard for his or her well-being.

Have you ever been in a classroom, for instance, when someone started talking about a difficult subject from a very personal perspective in an attempt to educate and inform others? When this happens, dialogue can follow.

Euthanasia, for instance, is a topic on which many people have a predetermined position either for or against. In a classroom discussion years ago, a student revealed that her family chose “passive euthanasia” for a loved one by not administering any more

life-saving drugs. She detailed the decision-making process and the pain that accompanied both the decision and the eventual death of her father. She revealed the initial questions they considered—would it be what he wanted, would the neighbors and other relatives understand, would we be able to do it—and she detailed the lingering questions—did we do the right thing? The student offered an honest portrait of her family’s situation by detailing the research they did and the tears they shared. The result was that her classmates were driven to ask more questions and eventually to understand that textbook and media discussions on the subject often miss the important human dimensions of care, agony, uncertainty, and hope that are woven into the fabric of the subject. The dialogue in the room that day transformed how many understood the controversial practice of euthanasia.

Classroom discussion in no way guarantees dialogue, however. Have you ever been in a situation when someone started talking about abortion, for instance, and soon the talking turned into heated conversation and then forceful argument? The speaker likely never even considered that there might be people in the room who had an abortion, or counseled someone not to have one, or had been close to someone who had to make a decision about keeping or terminating a pregnancy.

What typically follows when the topic of abortion becomes a depersonalized yet heated monologue is that many of the other students simply tune out what the speaker is saying. Or, if someone does respond, and the reply comes out just as forcefully as the first speaker’s words, the interaction quickly becomes a competition to “win” the argument or at least to have the last say. This sets up a negative spiral of communication that disregards the possibility of deep understanding or the transformation of our views or even taking some time to think. Rather, people get locked into their positions as they experience agitation toward the others who hold different views. This kind of *polarized communication* is best recognized as the “I am right, you are wrong” form of talk.

DON’T POLARIZE—CONNECT!

The corrective to polarized communication is to encourage dialogue, often with the first move involving a question or a proposition that is open-ended. For example, someone who wanted to honestly confront the complexities of abortion might offer this opening to the conversation. “I have never known anyone who had an abortion and I know that those on both sides of the issue hold strong views. I, myself, am against it because I love children so

much. Still, I know most people love children so I wonder how people who are in favor of abortion see the issue?"

Discussions of ethically controversial issues can take place with or without dialogue, but when dialogue is absent, the conversation is often full of technical arguments or settled/insistent/self-righteous moral judgments. One of the most widely witnessed case of euthanasia involved the 41-year-old Terri Schiavo of St. Petersburg, Florida. When she was 26, Terri collapsed at home, and with oxygen cut off to her brain, she fell unconscious and ten days later lapsed into a coma. Three years later she was diagnosed as being in a "persistent vegetative state." The public debate surrounding the issue came to a head in 2005 after years of legal struggles between husband Michael Schiavo and Terri's parents, Robert and Mary Schindler.

The communication in the public arena generally lined up behind either the husband or the parents. For the husband and his supporters, keeping Terri in a "vegetative state" was, just as the words suggest, cruel and not in keeping with her wishes. The parents and those who supported them proclaimed that no medical professional or other human had the moral or legal authority to take away Terri's "right to life." The way in which people took sides and labeled the situation left little room to have *any* conversation about important end-of-life definitions and issues. Instead of seeking understanding, the focus of the talk shifted to defending a position by trashing the other position, name-calling, and blaming. On March 31, 2005, Terri Schiavo was pronounced dead after her gastric feeding tube was removed in accordance with the last legal verdict.

Euthanasia is not an easy subject to discuss. And there are no guarantees that people will want to engage in a dialogue about it. However, when the euthanasia debate takes the turn toward dialogue, as it did in the classroom example described earlier, the conversation will generally surface the deep struggle we as individuals experience in wanting to preserve a loved one's dignity and at the same time exhaust all possibilities that a medical cure will be discovered to save a life that still has a beating heart. When that happens, euthanasia moves out of declarations of moral righteousness. When someone speaks from their experience to explain how and why an end-of-life decision was made or not for a family member, even listeners who have not had to face the same decision are invited to imagine something real through the words, tone, and invitation of another. The result is rarely to cast judgment. Instead, an empathetic hand is extended outward.

Sometimes that hand can be extended quite literally. Ethics is communicated not only through our words, but also in simple gestures like a celebratory pat on the back, or the enthusiastic grasp of another's hand in support, or the comfort of a touch on the shoulder. The ways we physically approach another, stand close to her, or demonstrate a recognition and appreciation of another through our head nods and eye contact convey our ethical posture. This desire to build relationships underscores the ethical imperative to put ourselves in the company of others. Philosopher Alphonso Lingis reminds us that in the end, communication is foremost an expression of this longing to be with other people. What we say in our interactions is sometimes less important than just being there, next to someone, saying something, anything.

PUBLIC DIALOGUE

. . . Despite the potential for transformative outcomes that dialogue promises, experience shows that we are not always willing to struggle together through talk in cooperative ways. Sometimes, we want to hold on to our beliefs or position tightly, leaving no room for another's views. Sometimes, we feel so certain that "our" way is the best that we fiercely work to persuade others to believe the same. That can work, sometimes, when our approach is fueled by a compassionate desire that reaches the other's heart and mind. However, when the strategies we use end up backing other people into the proverbial corner—it's my way or no way—the creative spark is extinguished and along with it, any hope for meaningful dialogue. Instead, we find ourselves locked into competing positions and wondering what's wrong with those who disagree with us.

A number of models exist for encouraging dialogue about public issues. The National Issues Forum, Study Circles, Public Conversations Project, The Democracy Project, Let's Talk America, Public Dialogue Consortium, and the Search for Common Ground projects are just some of the organizations working to bring people with differing views together in order to learn from one another and make decisions about their collective future. From small groups to large gatherings, citizens generally meet to discuss a relevant topic, listen to the stories others tell about their understanding and experiences, consider options, explore choices, pursue consensus and/or public judgment, and discuss the values inherent in each position. Participants are encouraged to share their opinions, concerns, and knowledge as they listen to what others also have to say before analyzing possible next steps and taking public action. In these dialogue groups, people discuss campaign issues, the

environment, religion, community planning visions, educational reform measures, health issues, domestic and foreign policy, and even democratic cornerstones for public participation.

Whether in a group, or through one-on-one conversations, each of us has the capacity to open ourselves up to dialogue about world issues—ask questions, listen intently, contribute ideas, and learn from others. You might even want to take a lesson from someone like Fran Peavey, who traveled the world with a sign saying “American Willing to Listen,” hoping to learn what mattered to people in different countries by asking broad, open-ended questions and then just earnestly listening. The effect was that the experience changed her life, broadened her perspectives, and sharpened her desire to do more to help the world.

DIALOGUE AND RECONCILIATION

It is vital to talk about our past and our hopes for the future within a context of current conditions so that we can bear witness to the suffering that exists in the world. Many people would rather not see the pain and misery that occur in virtually every community alongside the joy and success that are evident as well. But to be able to work toward a more just world, we need to see, hear, and feel the anguish that some people experience. We need to ask why they are not benefiting from a community’s resources. Doing so allows us to assess how we can contribute to a collective solution. When we choose to see the injustices in the world, talk to people who have been wronged, and stand with those who fight for fairness and equality, we put our ethics into action through speech and deed.

In addition to being an ally to someone or some group who could benefit from your voice, it is vital to recognize the importance of reconciliatory gestures to help move us through our conflicts and pain. When Amish children in a one-room schoolhouse in Pennsylvania were taken hostage and killed by a gunman, Charles Roberts, who then committed suicide, grief-stricken Amish families also reached out to console Roberts’s wife and children. They immediately organized a charitable fund for the family. Dozens even attended Roberts’s funeral. As we turn our passion and compassion into action, it is helpful to now and again take a step back to survey the situation. Are there people who need to be acknowledged for their work? Does someone deserve your apology? Can forgiving others, or ourselves, help us to repair our relationships and our community?

From individual action to collective response, many countries around the world and cities in the United States have had to confront difficult histories. Task forces, commissions, and state-sponsored

panels have researched horrific acts of violence or tragedies with enduring effects.

In Greensboro, North Carolina, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission was established in 2004 to examine the context, causes, sequence, and consequence of the events of November 3, 1979, when five anti-Klan demonstrators were killed and ten wounded by Ku Klux Klan and Nazi party members. In the absence of any police, a nine-car caravan of white supremacists drove into town to disrupt a “Death to the Klan” march in a black public housing community. Despite film footage captured by four television crews on the scene, the Klan and Nazis involved were twice found not guilty of criminal charges by all-white juries. A third, civil trial eventually found members of the Greensboro Police Department jointly liable with Klan and Nazi members for the wrongful death of one of the victims.

Many in the Greensboro community felt that justice had not been served, and so they initiated the Greensboro Truth and Community Reconciliation Project, a democratic process to investigate and assess trial evidence, records from law enforcement departments, media coverage, and hundreds of interviews and personal statements. Seven truth commissioners, their staff, and volunteers spent two years reviewing and weighing the evidence to prepare a 529-page final report.

The commission’s findings, conclusions, and recommendations were made public to prompt dialogue that could lead to much-needed reconciliation among various sectors of the community. Part of that process, the commissioners hoped, would include citizens becoming more aware of the signs that problems exist in the community surrounding labor, race, poverty, oppression, privilege, and justice. Nearly one hundred religious, civic, neighborhood, and educational groups agreed to read portions of or the entire report in order to have conversations about the content. It is through those conversations that the truth commissioners expected positive changes to occur in city policies, community governance, and citizen initiatives.

Hope for a better future resides in episodes of talk and displays of action infused with an ethical sensibility to care for and understand others. This work, of taking the time to sit with another, engaging in conversation, being mindful of our speech, and sometimes even working through difficult dialogues, is not always pleasant. It is work, however, that is important and necessary to reach understanding, appreciation, and respect in a world we occupy with diverse others.

QUICK REFERENCE: ETHICAL DIALOGUE

SLOW DOWN AND LISTEN

Speak calmly and listen a lot. Avoid the automatic comeback. And work for better understanding. Ask questions, and mean them. Restate others' views to make sure you "get" it.

CONNECT

Seek common ground. Approach differences against a background of probable agreement. Recognize complexity on the other side (and yours). Don't polarize. Keep the focus on the main points.

WELCOME OPENINGS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Think constructively; make suggestions. Look for first steps and partial measures. Always be *for* something and not just *against* something.

STAY ENGAGED

Speak in a careful, open-ended, and helpful way. Avoid slogans and sound bites. Treat facts as tools. Expect the key questions to remain open.



FOR REVIEW

1. What is the opposite of "taking all the room you can" in a dialogue?
2. What are some specific ways to "connect" instead of separating and polarizing people and arguments?
3. What is the opposite of exploiting weaknesses and openings? Be concrete.
4. What is the opposite of "going for the quick kill"? Be concrete.
5. Why is dialogue an ethical task as well as a practical one?
6. What are some of the ways that a dialogue may be under duress?
7. What are some of the ways that the text recommends responding when dialogue is under duress?
8. What is the Common Ground approach to dialogue?
9. Why is the Common Ground approach not the same as compromise?
10. What does Spoma Jovanovic mean when she writes that "Speech is a move to extend ourselves to another human being"?

11. Contrast a monologue to a dialogue about a contentious issue such as abortion or euthanasia.
12. How can public dialogue lead to reconciliation?



FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

11.1 WORDS MATTER!

Practice in more constructive and ethical dialogues might well begin with some careful attention to words. For words matter! They not only communicate but also literally create and define our worlds.

Think, for example, about how we describe older people in our community. “Old,” “elderly,” “senior,” and “mature” are considered synonyms. Yet, each of these words may be interpreted in slightly different ways. The descriptive word, “old,” may generate or reinforce views that older people are frail, likely to soon die, and a burden for family members. More positive attitudes about “older adults” or “retired professionals” communicate a respect for the wisdom and wealth of experiences acquired over a lifetime. Common core values and beliefs in Asian and Native American societies translate into a deep respect for “elders” who keep culture alive, teach young people through stories, and reinforce strong family and community structures. Elders are viewed as the ones who not only know the facts surrounding traditions but also demonstrate deep and thoughtful judgment that comes from the study and practice of those traditions. (More on alternative visions of aging in chapter 14.)

It is worth noting here that our word choices are more than choosing “politically correct” language, which has acquired the connotation that “regular” people somehow have to walk on eggshells so as not to offend others. What we are discussing here is the recognition that our words indeed have an impact on others, but also shape our own feelings and thoughts. In being mindful of the power of speech, and its naturally ethical nature, we will make choices to reflect our care for others.

For practice taking care with words, consider the following challenges.

- As blended families become more common, we need to find the right words to describe our new relationships. A new “stepmother” may not appreciate a term that conjures up Cinderella images of a strict old woman making her stepchildren do hard labor. “Stepbrothers” or “half-sisters” are words that define some sibling relationships, yet they also may fail to convey loving relationships that often result as two families come together as one. Consider what words and terms of endearment can best describe a blended

family you know. Maybe you'll have to come up with altogether new words to communicate the quality of relationships that exist in that family.

- The abortion debate is filled with loaded language that has the ability to sidetrack conversation before it even begins. What happens when we use the term “unborn child” instead of “fetus,” “product of conception,” “embryo,” or “baby”? What feelings do these words evoke, and how do the words condition the conversation to follow? The use of clinical or scientific terms may deflect the moral concerns, while the use of family terms will surely evoke feelings of protectiveness. Think about how our talk is affected by using words like “mother” rather than “pregnant woman.” When we talk about abortion as a “procedure,” we will likely focus on the medical aspects. When we talk about abortion as “murder,” we evoke a very different set of values and judgments.
- Whether you are “pro-life” (against abortion) or “pro-choice” (for a woman’s right to choose), draft a statement of how you feel and what more you would like to know about on this issue, but without using terms that condemn or slyly disadvantage positions different than your own. Find someone else willing to do the same and then read each other’s statements. Note what conversation follows. What words triggered negative emotions for you or the other person? What words or terms invited you to ask more questions?

11.2 REWORKING DYSFUNCTIONAL DIALOGUES

Following are a number of short classroom dialogues that are also ethically dysfunctional—short exchanges that seldom rise above the level of fruitless debates. Each of them is just the opening of a discussion, but it also already presents some opportunities for new directions, for more constructive conversations. Each could be taken in many different better ways.

Read each dialogue aloud together. Then identify the places where the dialogue goes bad. What are its failures? Why does it so quickly turn fruitless?

Next, identify its missed opportunities. What are some of the places where this dialogue could have taken a more constructive turn? Are there interesting ideas that the opposed sides could explore together? Do points of possible agreement come into view? Are questions asked that could be understood as genuine questions and answered without more rhetoric?

Finally, rewrite the dialogue in a more constructive key, and read the new dialogue aloud for the whole group. Analyze the methods of dialogue you are trying to use.

One note: be very watchful of the temptation to just prettify the exchanges, or to “make nice.” The aim is not necessarily to agree in the end: constructive dialogue can involve very sharp disagreements. Still, try to end with at least some open question or potentially constructive possibility. On the other

hand, do not just state the same disagreements in nicer ways. Try to imagine the dialogue beginning as written but then heading in different and more fruitful directions. It will help to review the rewritten dialogue in the second section of this chapter before beginning this exercise.

■ POVERTY

- M:** I just passed a homeless guy holding his sign out at the intersection.
- N:** It's disgusting how people like that come and put themselves on display and play on your sympathies and tie up traffic too. They're just bums eating up my tax dollars.
- M:** Are you kidding? The problem is probably that he's not getting any social support because you and your right-wing friends cut them all off so you could afford bigger yachts. You call that Christian?
- N:** Even Jesus said that the poor will always be with us. You're ranting and raving about how terrible we are, but if you think about it, the poor in America are rich compared to even the rich in other countries. Whole families in Africa get less money in a year than one welfare mother in Chicago gets in a month.
- M:** Not that you have any idea of the actual numbers, I bet.
- N:** Oh, and you do?
- M:** I'd like to see *you* try to live on such a pittance, even for a week.
- N:** I certainly wouldn't sit around all day feeling sorry for myself. I believe in work—that's how to get ahead. God helps those who help themselves.
- M:** What a crazy idea of God! A really sensible God would help those who need help!

■ HUNTING

- A:** So I was taking my six-year-old to my local sports store to get her outfitted for soccer. We walk in and right there in front is a duck-hunting display. Guns and ammo and camo. She's crying and going, "What?!!!" It never occurred to her that killing animals could be considered a sport.
- B:** I guess she'll learn.
- A:** Learn what? That there's kicking a ball around and then there's slaughtering animals for fun, and they're basically the same?
- C:** Hunting is a serious adult activity, and is enjoyable besides. Not that you would know, apparently.
- D:** I bet it's especially enjoyable for the ducks.
- E:** A sport is a contest of skill, right? So for one thing, each side should have an equal chance. I wonder how many hunters would consider it "sporting" if the animal had an equal chance to kill *them*.

A: Like bullfighting, maybe.

E: Bull-fighters do sometimes get gored. Though it's still true that the whole premise is that the bull dies in the end. And millions of people find this enjoyable to watch, besides.

C: I have no interest in bull fighting. But you have to understand this: me and my father and his father before him were law-abiding sportsmen. I loved our hunting trips! Sometimes we just walked through the woods and never shot anything. Also, you forget that sportsmen are major supporters of habitat protection and other environmental causes that you and your crybaby daughter are probably really big on. Without duck hunters, what would happen to wetlands?

■ FACEBOOK POST—POLICE BRUTALITY

Status

I just feel like I need to talk about the so called “police brutality” in this state. I am not one to take to Facebook with my opinions, but when it comes to family I need to speak up. My dad has been a decorated police officer in Columbia, SC for over 25 years and almost all of the people he arrests for gunrelated crimes are black men. He is not a racist, he is not a bigot, he is a good man. But if he shoots a black man for reaching into his pocket, he has good reason to do so. All he is trying to do is protect you and your families. Stop blaming him for doing his job.

Comments

Woman: Yes exactly!! My son is a cop and I think he should do whatever it takes to protect himself from those crazy people out there. I always tell him, don't think, just shoot.

Uncle: Glad to see this family has some sense of loyalty. My nephew is so smart! Keep defending our boys in blue!!

Classmate: I completely disagree. . . . too many innocent people are getting killed because police assume they are carrying. Under no circumstances should we fire weapons without reason. Your father and his friends are putting my family in danger by assuming all black people are guilty no matter what we do. This clearly isn't about safety, it is about race.

OP: Haha thanks @Uncle . . . just tryna stick up for the fam.

OP: @Classmate if that was your father you wouldn't want him to hesitate to shoot a suspect. These people are running around killing each other and it's up to us to

keep our city safe. It doesn't matter black or white, if the police think you have a gun then they should do whatever is necessary to protect our city.

Classmate: Interesting . . . since in South Carolina alone twice as many black people as white people are killed by police . . . if you really think your dad and the SC police aren't racist then maybe you should check your facts before you go on a facebook rant. <https://sunlightfoundation.com/2014/08/25/cdc-data-tells-us-black-people-are-at-higher-risk-than-white-people-to-be-killed-police/>

OP: Hold up @Classmate . . . I was only trying to defend my dad and I am just as entitled to my opinion as you are. Don't criticize me because I don't think the same way you do.

Classmate 2: Nothing wrong with agreeing to disagree, let's not get too heated guys.

■ IMMIGRATION

W: Deporting illegal aliens is easy: arrest them and send them home. You know where they are: bus stations, taco trucks, mowing your neighbor's yard. No need to round them all up at once. Just arrest one or two every day at different locations around town, the message will get out.

Y: Right, a message of stereotyping and intolerance. "Taco truck," my foot. Undocumented immigrants deserve better than that.

W: Oh no, you don't—I'm not playing that evasion game. Calling an illegal alien an "undocumented immigrant" is like calling a burglar an "uninvited house guest." They're not just "undocumented"—they're criminals!

Y: They may have broken a law by coming here, yes. That doesn't make them the moral equivalent of burglars. And "alien" isn't their *identity*. Many Mexican-Americans are citizens, remember, and they're all people, anyway.

V: Yeah, W, do you realize that the whole history of anti-immigrant fervor is a story of racism? In the 19th century there was a period of anti-Irish prejudice—Irish weren't even considered white. Before that, anti-German. Now it's anti-Central American. It's easy to stereotype and degrade the down-and-out and desperate. But unless you are Native American, your ancestors were immigrants too, and probably just about as desperate when they got off the boat.

W: I *am* a native American, dammit!

V: You know what I meant.

W: I was born here. My grandparents came here legally and earned their citizenship by study and hard work. They didn't sneak in some dark night and steal a job from a real American.

Y: Sure, and how many "real Americans" are going to pick tomatoes in a hot dusty field, dawn to dusk, for minimum wage or less, no health care, constantly bullied, barely a place to live? We're the ones who ought to be ashamed of ourselves, treating people like that.

W: Wages may have to go up a little, I guess.

Y: A lot. And so will prices. Then I suppose the wing-nuts will start in on the unions.

V [to W]: So face it, gringo: you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem.

■ BATHROOM BILLS

Bueller University is in North Carolina, where House Bill 2 has just been passed. This bill, among other things, mandates that people use the bathroom that matches the gender they were assigned at birth. This means that transgender people would be unable to use the bathroom that matches their gender identity, and that they could be legally punished for doing so. Jesse, Rory, and Peyton noticed that the bathroom signs at Bueller University have been covered up with new, student-made posters. Instead of "men" and "women" signs, the signs say "cat person" and "dog person." The group of friends are hanging out in the student center, and Jesse has just come back from the bathroom.

Jesse: I just had the weirdest experience in the bathroom. Have you seen the signs covering up the normal "men" and "women" bathroom signs?

Rory: Yeah, what the hell is that about?!

Jesse: Well, I think I know what it's about—it was just super unsettling. The signs say they're supposed to make students think about how hard it is for transgender students to use the bathroom, so they invented new bathroom categories that aren't related to gender. But then I honestly didn't know which one I was supposed to use, because they covered up the normal signs—I had to think back and remember which one is the women's room, and then take off the sign to make sure I was right.

- Rory:** Wait, WHAT? You're telling me that people don't know how to pick which bathroom they should use? Just go to the one you've been using your whole life!
- Jesse:** Well I think the point is that some people change how they identify over time. So you might be assigned male at birth but actually identify as female. And if you change your body to match your conception of your gender, then you might need to switch which bathroom you use.
- Rory:** OK, whatever, I didn't ask for a lesson in gender identity—I had that during orientation. But why does it matter? Aren't there single stall bathrooms upstairs that they could use?
- Peyton:** Well, I *do* think it's important for people to use that bathroom they're most comfortable with, but I'm frustrated that the queer community on campus has to make everything so political. I'm gay, so HB2 affects me too, but I'm not out there re-labeling all the bathroom signs. That won't change anything—the law was already passed.
- Jesse:** Yeah! And honestly I'm an ally and support trans people, but all I want to do is use the bathroom and I need to know which one to use! What's wrong with that?
- Peyton:** I guess I just disagree with the bathroom re-labeling strategy. Like, it's a pretty extreme form of activism and that's not even going to change who uses which bathroom. If students want to make a change they should talk to the administration and get it done the right way.
- Jesse:** I mean I guess if we have questions or feedback for the people who posted the signs, we could ask. They set up a Twitter account for addressing this stuff.

Following are the tweets each student composed:

Peyton: @BuellerHB2Protest As a queer student, I'm frustrated that you re-labeled the bathroom. It's not changing anything. Just #DwellingOnHB2

Jesse: @BuellerHB2Protest I identify as an ally, but I just need to know where to pee #IFeelMarginalized

Rory: @BuellerHB2Protest what about the attacks that would happen in bathrooms if men wearing dresses sneak into the wrong one #SomeSegregationIsFine

11.3 LEARNING TO LISTEN

The readings for this chapter emphasize that the foundation of ethical dialogue is an openness to the other persons involved in the exchange. Here are

some projects that may help you practice that openness more consciously and systematically.

- You and your friends probably agree on a lot of things—best kinds of music, important issues in society, and even ways of talking to one another. To expand your horizons, actively seek out someone who has a completely different orientation from yours and listen to what he/she has to say on these subjects. Does that change, in any way, how you feel? Do you better see (really *feel*, not just “know” in some abstract sense) that your perspective is not necessarily the “best” but only one of the possible ways of understanding?
- Spend time at a homeless shelter or assisted living facility so that you can get to know some of the people there. As you gain their trust, listen for the stories of their lives and see what values emerge in the telling. As you tell others about your experiences, notice what information you highlight and how that carries with it certain values as well. Do the two sets of values coincide? What differences emerge?
- Identify someone with whom you have a relationship who would benefit from your heartfelt listening and set up time to do just that. It may be helpful to set aside 30 minutes for the other person to do most, if not all, of the talking. At the end, consider what you learned about this person you didn’t know before, and examine your own feelings at stepping back into the role of listener.
- Identify a situation where you have a different perspective than the one being discussed, and, staying true to ethical speech that considers fully the other person (or people), put forth your best attempt at explaining your position and understanding the other position. What happens? Analyze what you might do differently next time.
- Attend a public meeting (city council, county commissioners, school board) and pay attention to the ways in which the elected or appointed officials listen (or don’t listen) to one another and the public. Notice, too, if you can tell what values are being communicated in the words, tone, and focus of their talk. What recommendations could you make to improve the quality of ethical discussion?

NOTES

I am grateful to Professor Spoma Jovanovic not only for her contribution to this chapter but for her consistent engagement with this whole text, which has enriched not only this edition but the project as a whole. In addition to her essay reprinted here, Exercises 11.1 and 11.3 are very largely hers.

In Exercise 11.2, “Facebook Post” was written by Felicia Cenca and Courtney Crowell, Elon class of 2016, and “Bathroom Bills” by Felicia Cenca and Claire Lockard, also class of 2016.

Two helpful practical book on ethics and dialogue are Roger Fisher and William Ury’s classic book *Getting to Yes* (Penguin, 1983) and Tom Rusk, *The Power of Ethical Persuasion* (Penguin, 1994). Rusk “applies the ethical principles of respect, understanding, caring, and fairness . . . to high-stakes conversations often threatened by strong emotions and defensive reactions.” Many of Rusk’s themes parallel this chapter’s, though his focus is chiefly on one-on-one conversations about professional or personal matters, rather than larger conversations about moral issues.

For a practical introduction to the emerging field of “invitational rhetoric”—an explicitly ethical and constructive approach to public argumentation—see Sonja K. Foss and Karen A. Foss’s text *Inviting Transformation* (Waveland Press, third edition, 2011).

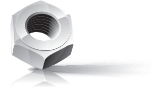
This chapter’s box on dialogue under duress draws upon an intriguing book by Phyllis Beck Kritek, *Negotiating at an Uneven Table: Developing Moral Courage in Resolving Our Conflicts* (Jossey-Bass, second edition, 2002). The story about Native Americans comes from her p. 36, the advice about “using your own language” from p. 279. There is much other useful advice.

For more on communication ethics and dialogue, see William Neher and Paul Sandin’s introductory textbook *Communicating Ethically: Character, Duties, Consequences, and Relationships* (Allyn and Bacon, 2017), and Ronald Arnett and Pat Arneson, *Philosophy of Communication Ethics: Alterity and the Other* (Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2014). To read the Greensboro Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Final Report or Executive Summary (discussed in Professor Jovanovic’s essay), see www.greensborotrc.org. For Professor Jovanovic’s account of the project, see her book *Democracy, Dialogue, and Community Action: Truth and Reconciliation in Greensboro* (University of Arkansas Press, 2012). A practical account of twenty-one truth commissions from all over the world is offered in *Unspeakable Truths: Facing the Challenge of Truth Commissions* (Routledge, 2002) by Priscilla B. Hayner.

Online you can find a great profusion of guides and reference materials about community dialogue and related projects, including those mentioned in this chapter and many other as well:

- The National Issues Forum, www.nifi.org
- Study Circles, www.everyday-democracy.org
- Essential Partners: Bold Explorations in Community, www.publicconversations.org
- The American Democracy Project, www.aascu.org/programs/adp

- Public Dialogue Consortium, www.publicdialogue.org
- Search for Common Ground, www.sfcg.org
- National Coalition Building Institute, www.ncbi.org
- InterGroup Dialogue: <https://igr.umich.edu>
- National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation: <http://ncdd.org/>
- Sustained Dialogue: www.sustaineddialogue.org.
- Theatre for the Living: theatreforliving.com. This is one (of many!) interactive theater companies, stemming from the work of Augusto Boal. A community creates a script addressing a difficult topic, and then performs the play up to a key point of conflict. At that point the play begins again and this time “spect-actors” can intervene and join the play and the characters continue the play engaging the interventions. The theme for 2016 examines reconciliation from Canadian-First Nations’ perspectives after the national reconciliation process that has been ongoing over the past several years.



When Values Clash

One of the aims of ethics is to help us make progress when values clash. Mindful dialogue can help, and you can take more care with facts and inferences and look for “like cases” and carefully spell out the values at stake. Still, even so, deep conflicts will arise. What then?

RIGHT VERSUS RIGHT

Here is a starting point. Consider that in nearly every serious moral conflict, each side has a point. Each side speaks for something worth considering. *Each side is right about something.*

On one level, this statement is totally obvious. In fact, it is the reason we have such deep-seated conflicts in the first place. Each side fastens onto one or a few relevant values and makes it the whole story. They’re right: the values for which they speak *are* relevant, indeed maybe even essential. It’s just that there are quite likely others that are also relevant and maybe essential too. Like the proverbial blind men and the elephant, we each come to the debate tightly grasping our one small part of the beast, certain that we have the whole truth—and of course our part *is* true enough. But it is probably not the only true part.

In popular moral debate, though, the loudest advocates almost always act as if only one side can be right, that only one side—their own, of course—has a monopoly on truth and the other side is just misguided or blind. On most major moral issues, there are usually supposed to be just two, clearly distinct and opposite, positions. “Pro-life” sets itself up against “pro-choice” and vice versa. On animal rights, assisted suicide, abortion, and a host of other issues, it’s always just “yes or no.” Almost no other options even get discussed. No ambiguity, no gray areas, no middle ground.

Yet the minute we step back from the heat of debate, we can readily see that both sides could be right in their ways. Most moral conflicts are real, not just mistakes by one side or the other about what really matters. There is genuine good (and/or right, and/or virtue, and/or care) on *both* sides—on *all* sides. There are compelling reasons to promote assisted suicide and

affirmative action and abortion rights and animal rights—and there are other compelling reasons to resist them. That’s life.

“Only dogmatism,” wrote the pragmatic social philosopher John Dewey,

can suppose that serious moral conflict is between something clearly bad and something known to be good, and that uncertainty lies wholly in the will of the one choosing. Most conflicts of importance are conflicts between things which are or have been satisfying, not between good and evil.

Again—they are choices between one good thing and another. Not “right versus wrong” but “right versus *right*.” We need to start by honoring that fact.

WHAT IS EACH SIDE RIGHT ABOUT?

If moral conflicts pose choices between one good thing and another, then we do not need to approach opposing views looking for their weak points (according to us). We can start the other way around: by looking for their *strong* points. This could be our maxim:

Ask not which side is right, but what each side is right about.

Even moral arguments that make absolutely no sense to you do make sense to others who are every bit as intelligent and well-intentioned as you. Surely there is something in them. Figure out what it is.

Be careful not to confuse this maxim with “relativism”—a tricky category, as you know from our discussion in chapter 2. The suggestion is certainly not that anything that anyone thinks is automatically right. Any position on any complex and contentious matter can be, and likely is, wrong about all sorts of things too. Rather, the suggestion here is simply a matter of strategic attention: regardless of what might be wrong or contentious, to start by seeking out the *positive* on the other side. In fact, our side and the other side are often two ways of looking at the same thing. What’s weak or incomplete (in that sense “wrong”) about our own views is often a strong point of (something “right” about) others’—and vice versa. We might as well look at it constructively!

Take, for example, the debate about assisted suicide. Should doctors be able to assist certain people to enable their own dying—at least, people who are approaching death or total disability and probably in great pain? One side says yes: suicide may be the only way in which some people can finally escape their unrelenting pain; and besides, we are free individuals entitled to make that choice. Others say no: allowing and perhaps encouraging doctors to kill, or even just to assist in death, takes a step toward devaluing life, and who knows where it will lead. Life is precious even in pain.

This is a difficult matter, for sure. But it is difficult precisely because both sides have valid points. Freedom from pain matters, and autonomy matters,

and also respect for life matters. We do have a problem here. But the problem is not really that we disagree about basic values. We agree all too well, about *many!*

The same goes for ethical theories. Utilitarians are surely right to stress that one good reason in favor of assisted suicide is the relief of pain. The prevention or relief of pointless suffering is a good thing. Listen to the stories of some of the people who want and need help to die, and your heart goes out to them. They have little to look forward to but unrelenting and debilitating pain. Let them go!

But there are other values in play too. Kant, for example, proposes a striking way to think about suicide. “If [we] kill [ourselves] in order to escape from painful circumstances,” he wrote, “we use a person [ourselves] merely as a means to maintain a tolerable condition to the conclusion of life.” Once life offers us no more pleasure, it may be tempting to conclude that our life has no more value. But this move, so very natural if you think just in terms of pleasures and pains, is for Kant to overlook a whole dimension of value. Our lives, he argues, matter *in themselves*, not just as a means to something else, even of our own. We must respect our own lives just as we must respect the lives of others around us.

Character matters too in the face of suffering and death. We can respond with courage, humility, resoluteness—virtues. We are called to care and responsiveness in the face of others’ suffering as well. When we begin to realize that people sometimes choose suicide out of a pain that is not so much physical as emotional (from bereavement, abandonment, sense of uselessness—in short, from the loss of community and relatedness), we realize that other and more life-affirming responses are also possible.

Each family of values has a contribution to make. We’re not necessarily stalemated if we can’t choose between them—that’s only if you assume that we must finally go with just one. But we don’t. Each highlights certain values left to the side by the others. They’re *all* right in their ways. Each has at least some pieces of the puzzle.

IS CONFLICT THE NORM?

For some people ethics seems to be *only* about the conflict of values. Mention the word “ethics” itself and we may immediately think of moral controversies: abortion, affirmative action, animals, assisted suicide . . . and that’s just the A’s.

But conflict stands out partly because we expect and look for it. We are told constantly that we live in a conflictual society. Some media thrive on opposition and anger. Adversarial argument is the foundation of our court

system. Many politicians, on both (all) ends of the ideological spectrum, try to mobilize their supporters by oversimplifying and demeaning the “other side”—usually oversimplifying their own as well. Even the TV news now features loud and opinionated arguments.

Even so, despite all of this, I would argue that conflict is really more like a special case, not the whole story of ethics, or even the main story most of the time. Many moral values have very friendly relations. Think of the four main families of moral values. Each is a big tent. Aristotle and Confucius endorse very similar virtues. Philosophers as diverse as Kant and the Pope converge in their reverence for persons. Each family may be viewed as an inclusive group—an extended family, we might say, with room for relations from many times and places.

Of course, the families themselves differ, at least in theory. In practice, though, many times the different families agree on practical conclusions. It's not surprising that what serves happiness, for example, also tends to be considered virtuous, caring, and so on. Even when the families do not entirely agree, you could read the differences not so much as oppositional as complementary: that is, they simply speak for different but important aspects of problematic situations.

Specific moral values differ all over the map. Just think of how differently various cultures have treated sex, or our obligations to the poor, or who raises the children. But again, difference about these things does not automatically equal *conflict*. Sometimes our differences are just fascinating. They may even be a kind of cultural resource: looking at other cultures' ways may give us more new angles on our own. And often, even when we do feel dissonance between specific values, we can at least treat it as an invitation to keep thinking and exploring, not somehow as a demand to immediately nail down “our” single answer.

Of course there are, sometimes, clashes of values: direct oppositions, either within ourselves or between ourselves and others, that seem to require immediate attention. But how many must really be settled, once and for all, right now? What if we looked for complementarity or common ground even then—and also took our time?

BRINGING VALUES INTO CONGRUENCE

Probably the chief reason we hesitate to acknowledge that “Both (or, all) sides are right” is that we're afraid that then we'll be unable to do or decide anything. If both sides are right, what can we *do*? How can we possibly resolve the question and move ahead? Wouldn't we just be stuck?

In fact, there are many ways of going on from the acknowledgment that both (or all) sides have a point. People who deal regularly with conflict

resolution usually insist that only such an acknowledgment makes it *possible* to go on constructively.

Moreover, most of the conflict resolvers' methods are familiar. All of them are so eminently sensible that nothing in this section will be a surprise—though I hope it will be an inspiration. The task is to put them to use in ethics.

METHODS

Specifically, the task is to try to answer to all of the important values at stake, to try to honor what is right in each of them, rather than just one or a few. Let us call this *bringing values into congruence*.

This is a lot less mysterious than it may sound. In fact, we do something of the sort constantly in non-moral matters. We can distinguish three progressively more ambitious methods for bringing values into congruence.

One simple method is *compromise*. Suppose that for a trip my partner wants to go to the beach and I want to go to the mountains. We could just battle it out, or flip a coin, and end up doing one or the other. That's how it usually goes—a “win/lose” battle. Better would be to at least split the difference. Maybe this trip the beach, next trip the mountains. Or maybe we could do a little of each this time. Though compromising is sometimes treated as disgraceful or weak-willed, here it seems to be quite the opposite: a clear-headed acknowledgment of the diversity of values at stake, no big deal, and an attempt to answer at least partly to both of them.

Another method, better still, is to work from *compatible values*. Suppose that my partner and I try to figure out *why* we want to go to the beach or the mountains. Maybe it turns out that she wants to be able to swim and sunbathe and I want to be able to hike. These goals are not incompatible at all. There are some great lakes in the mountains and some great hiking trails at the beach. Both of us could have exactly what we want, at the same time. Why are we arguing?

Tonight my daughter and I are at home and she wants quiet and I want to listen to music. It would be a little crazy for us both to insist that only our desire is “right” and fight it out until one of us gets just what we want, putting down the other in the process. Why not just have music for a while and then quiet? Some of both. Or we can just work in different rooms. Or I could just get a pair of earphones, in which case we could both have exactly what we want. Here we move beyond mere compromise to a truly “win/win” solution. It may turn out that our competing desires aren't incompatible at all.

Finally, sometimes when we really look into the values on the “other” side, it turns out that some of them are not merely compatible but are in fact the very same values we hold ourselves. Though we tend to focus on our disagreements, our background agreements may be far more important. We can work from *common ground*. For example, in the trip question, my partner and I agree from the start that we want to spend our free time outside—in nature.

It may be that the exact location matters much less than simply being outside together, and being physically active. Suppose that we started our negotiation there. Basically, we're on the same page. We're in it together. Only the details need to be worked out.

CASE IN POINT

You may already glimpse many ways to apply these methods in ethics too. Here too, actually, they are no more than applied common sense.

Take the assisted suicide debate again. As soon as we shift focus and look for integrative possibilities, the "conflict" looks very different. For one thing, there is extensive shared moral ground. Though it is almost completely invisible if we view it as a battle, one of the most obvious things about the whole issue is that both sides agree that life is ordinarily a very precious thing, and *also* it is a very bad thing to suffer such pain that death seems appealing by comparison.

Well then, we need to ask, what can be done about *that*? What about developing super-powerful painkillers? What about removing the barriers that still block some dying people from using massive amounts of morphine or other painkillers that would be addictive or otherwise harmful if used by healthy people? Right away we have some common strategies.

And what about those people whose pain is so intense, even with medical help, and hope so remote, that it seems hard to deny that death can be a considered and humane choice? Your heart goes out to them, and I for one know that in their situation I might well wish the same thing.

My experience in many discussions of this issue over the years is that many people on both sides would be willing to accept a policy that allowed assisted suicide in such cases, but under tightly controlled conditions—that is, a compromise. Several independent doctors would have to concur; waiting periods could be required; double-checks would be necessary to be sure patients were not just temporarily depressed; communities and governments would need to be sure that people in pain always have alternatives—but *then*, given all this, if a person resolutely seeks to die, it is time to respect their wishes.

It may be possible, in short, to legalize assisted suicide in a limited way that both acknowledges the seriousness of taking life and its social dangers, while also recognizing that, sometimes at least, it can be a humane and proper choice. You might be interested to know that just this kind of solution has been adopted in the states of Oregon and Washington (and reaffirmed by the voters), with results that, while still controversial, at least aren't an epidemic of suicides. In each state, only around one hundred people per year have secured permission to request assisted suicide in recent years.

More exploration might help us see other possibilities and overlooked complexities. For example, pain isn't always the main issue. Surveys suggest

that people who seek assisted suicide often feel helpless, useless, and abandoned. Some of my students found a website that included biographies of the people that Dr. Jack Kevorkian—the famous (some say infamous) freelance crusader for assisted suicide—had helped to die. Though it was a pro-Kevorkian website, in reading people’s stories we began to realize that Kevorkian became a last resort for many people because they were not only in pain but also lacked any kind of family or social support. In some cases their spouses or children were driven away by their very condition—and in at least one case this very absence meant in turn that the affected person could not take strong painkillers, since he had no one to look after him when he was partly “knocked out.”

Neither side would say that in this kind of case the right “answer” is death. The real answer is to create communities of care such that people are not abandoned in this way. Relationship-centered values come to the fore. That’s a challenge to all of *us*, too, not just to stand by and judge the morality of certain kinds of suicide, but to keep people from the kinds of losses that drive them to such desperation in the first place. Once again, a constructive and *shared* response.

“FOCUS ON INTERESTS, NOT POSITIONS”

You’ve seen fine wood furniture whose pieces are fitted together with interlocked wedge-shaped cuts, like a dove’s tail, that fit together to form a tight joint. Carpenters call this “dovetailing.” Roger Fisher and William Ury, in their influential book *Getting to Yes*, invite us to take dovetailing as a metaphor for another way to bring apparently conflicting values into congruence. We may be able to fit seemingly opposite values together in a like way.

The key, they say, is to separate what they call “positions” from “interests.” Your position is what you say you want—which is often, truth be told, a rhetorical or political exaggeration, quite separate from your actual *interests*, which are your carefully considered needs. Fisher and Ury observe that although our positions often conflict head-on, our underlying interests may be much more compatible, or even, believe it or not, the same.

Here is a classic political example. From the Six-Day War of 1967 until Israel and Egypt sat down to negotiate after their next war in 1977, the Sinai Peninsula was a central and seemingly irresolvable issue between them. Egyptian territory, it had been captured by Israel and occupied as a buffer zone. Egyptian tanks right on the border had put hostilities on a hair-trigger in 1967, and Israel did not want to be so vulnerable again. Egypt, for its part, naturally wanted its territory back. Both sides insisted on their firmly opposed positions and the fundamental and quite legitimate principles (self-defense, historical right) behind them.

Their *interests*, however, were not so opposite. Neither side wanted another war, for one thing. On that point even these (then) deeply antagonistic states had something fundamental in common. And this was a remarkably useful fact, it turned out—though such basic common interests are often easy to overlook precisely because they *are* so basic. Moreover, even about Sinai their goals were rather different—not exactly opposite. Egypt wanted sovereignty: they wanted the land back. Israel wanted security: some kind of buffer zone. Are these interests necessarily opposed?

The eventual solution: Sinai was returned to Egypt, but *demilitarized*. Egypt got the land back *and* Israel got security. And the solution has held. No one in the 1960s or 70s would have thought it possible, but Egypt and Israel have been at peace ever since.

In ethics too, we know that “positions” often collide head-on. For decades, for example, moral and political pressure mounted to stop whale hunting, while whalers, from the shipowners to the crews, resisted. No surprise—their livelihood was at stake. Others were resolutely opposed to the whalers. Members of Greenpeace motored out in small boats in the open ocean to place themselves between the harpooners and the whales. Radical moral challenges were being raised, animals were dying, species were threatened. Things were intense.

Yet in the early 2000s, a transformation occurred. Shipowners began to realize that they could make far more money taking people out to *watch* whales than they could by killing them. Things started to look rather different. The very people who were the industry’s resolute enemies could become, well, *customers* of a successor industry, using the very same boats and docks, and an industry that did not endanger its own resource, to boot. Sea-people’s livelihoods turned out to be compatible, after all, with a new attitude toward the great sea mammals.

It was not long before the old whaling ports were becoming whale-*watching* ports, and we were discovering that even the most hostile whales (and why wouldn’t they be hostile after three centuries of being hunted without mercy?) can be astonishingly affectionate and curious. Today people are even out there making music with them. A benign (and from a business point of view, profitable) fascination with whales is blossoming all around the world (though whaling, and the struggle against it, still go on as well).

Did the whalers change their minds about whales too? Some did, I’m sure, once they were freed to look at whales another way. But some did not. They may still look at whales as a source of jobs and income. Yet even so, there turns out to be a better way than killing them—and a way that makes peace with the whales’ defenders as well. Former whalers themselves now campaign against the whale-killing that continues. It’s bad for business! And a variety of different interests are served—including the whales’ own.

WHEN TO HOLD FIRM

Integrative methods do have their limits. “Each side is right about something,” I have claimed. But there are surely exceptions. Mightn’t some issues really come down to “right versus wrong”? And don’t we want to hold firm to the “right” there?

How to Tell?

Sometimes it is easy to tell when a viewpoint really can’t claim any validity. Seething hatred, needless injury, random violence—these things have no defense.

In real, deep moral disagreements, things are not so clear. How can we tell whether we face another view that does speak for something important, even if at the moment we can’t see it—or a view that really *is* just plain wrong?

There are some ways. In the first place, keep in mind the basic families of values: the rights of the person, the happiness of society, the essential virtues, care and community. If major violations of these *central* values are proposed without a genuine reason of equal seriousness proposed in justification, warning flags should go up. This may not be a situation for compromise or any other kind of accommodation.

Of course, basic values can conflict—that is what creates the toughest moral problems in the first place. To serve fairness, the general happiness sometimes may need to be curtailed, and vice versa. But these are conflicts *between* basic values, not between basic values and less basic ones. To violate rights for the sake of appearances, or to abandon caring obligations because they got a little more expensive than we expected, is not a valid compromise but more like a betrayal.

Also: listen to the people. Normally there are serious people of good will on the other sides, people who are reasonable and well-intentioned, informed and careful. If you can find such people, you have a good sign that they do indeed speak for something important. If you can’t, more warning flags.

Of course, to do this you really have to *listen*. Remember that merely disagreeing with you does not make a viewpoint invalid or a person “uninformed” or “unreasonable.” (That would argue in a tight little circle, wouldn’t it: I’m right—because anyone who disagrees with me is uninformed and unreasonable—and I know they’re uninformed and unreasonable because they disagree with me!) It’s hard, but not impossible: it just takes some honesty and humility on your part. Take your time.

In fact, even when we really are confronted with an evil viewpoint, it is still essential to listen to its advocates. Not because we agree with them, but

to ask why the evil is so attractive. For example, fanaticism may sometimes arise out of a profound sense of insecurity. Hatred against “outside” groups may arise out of a deep sense of exclusion and disempowerment. And this too, before it settles on some scapegoat, could be a perfectly valid feeling. Just repressing the advocates of such evils leaves the attraction of the evil itself untouched. It may even become more attractive. Even here, then—even when we can genuinely distinguish right and wrong—we need to try to listen, to try to figure out the other side rather than just condemning it outright. That’s ethical too!

Drawing the Line in Real Life

Knowing where to draw the line is probably easier in practice than it sounds in theory. Many of the most difficult moral conflicts occur within groups or between people who are in other ways in regular contact and already respectful of each other. Here the other side’s intelligence and good intentions are not in question. And, of course, it’s easier to listen to them.

For example, many politically liberal secular groups make common cause with Catholics in a wide range of “pro-life” issues, from welfare and children’s rights to environmental causes. The same sides tend to divide sharply over a few issues, such as abortion. Here, though, channels of respect and communication have been easier to keep open. Neither side can demonize the other—they know each other too well.

Day to day, meanwhile, the people we argue and negotiate with—constantly—are our family, and friends, and colleagues, whose intelligence and good intentions are not in question either. Here especially the polarized language of “right” and “wrong” is not helpful. Keep a more open mind. There are certainly times to refuse any kind of integrative thinking, but they are the exception—not the rule.

BIG DECISIONS

Sometimes conflicting values go to the core of a community’s very identity. A religious congregation may be trying to decide whether and how to bless same-sex marriages. A town or city may be trying to decide how to defend its shrinking open space while being fair to landowners and keeping housing affordable. Are we willing to use extreme measures—what many would call torture—on suspected terrorists? And could we *please* work out some sort of settlement, finally, on abortion, and avoid a similar thirty-year battle over stem-cell research?

These are big decisions. The stakes are high, everyone in the community or nation, or maybe even the world is potentially affected, and the consequences

are lasting. Thus the stakes are high also for bringing values into congruence. In everyday thinking, a certain amount of horse-trading is fine: that is how legislatures pass budgets and co-workers in an office get along. But for larger and community-shaping decisions, must *draw explicitly and centrally on basic and broadly shared values*. It takes more time—and patience.

TAKING DEMOCRACY SERIOUSLY

Democracy is one of our key values. But democracy means much more than making decisions by majority vote. It means working by persuasion, open discussion, and consensus building around basic shared values. Again, *broad* majorities must be *settled* in their direction, not only to make a “big” ethical decision stick, but also to make such a decision ethical in the first place.

True, a temporarily ascendant side may suppress the opposition and force a decision. Prohibition is one example. Temperance moralizing had always had a place in America, especially on the frontiers, right alongside a lot of hard drinking. Activists would enter saloons, singing, praying, and urging saloon keepers to stop selling alcohol—a striking precursor to modern sit-ins and other protests on both ends of the political spectrum. But all of this remained on the moral fringes. With World War I, though, the government needed to divert grain from alcohol production to ethanol, saving gas for the war effort, and it became possible, just for a moment, for the Anti-Saloon League to play on anti-German sentiment (German immigrants were then the stereotypical beer drinkers) and push the 18th Amendment through state legislatures. A major though now mostly forgotten impetus was also the early feminist movement, which blamed alcohol, logically enough, for the abuse and abandonment of women and children by drunken husbands.

Prohibition actually succeeded, in the sense that it sharply reduced alcohol consumption in many areas. The problem was that it had few roots in broadly shared and durable values, and what roots it did have, like social justice concerns for women and children, were readily swept aside by the pushback.

Its moment passed almost immediately. Already by the mid-1920s, normalcy returned. Prohibition was widely mocked, then ignored, and soon repealed—but not before it helped fuel the rise of the Mob and undercut the moral authority of future prohibitions that might be better founded.

Likewise, some commentators suggest that the *Roe v. Wade* decision short-circuited a larger discussion that was moving toward a more sustainable resolution on the abortion issue. It’s hard to imagine now, but in the early 1970s momentum was building for liberalizing the then very strict abortion laws. Conservatives actually tended to favor legalizing abortion as a means of population control. Many churches were acknowledging that

abortion could be an acceptable moral choice under some circumstances. The law was lagging behind, yes, but it was still a shock when the 1973 Supreme Court declared abortion a constitutionally protected privacy right in the first trimester of pregnancy.

Roe has been controversial ever since, both as an exercise of judicial power and as an assertion of the priority of privacy rights over other rights and/or other relevant values. But what might have been? What if we had been able to work the abortion question out in a less polarized and gradual way? The last thirty-odd years might have been different. Even now some such movements are happening. The Supreme Court spent much of the subsequent decades hedging: a variety of restrictions, such as waiting periods, parental notification, and so on, have been allowed by the Court, while others have been rejected. Middle ground may be re-emerging, but it is such slow and difficult work!

By contrast, consider the way in which the nation moved in response to the civil rights movement. It too evoked intense opposition at first. But here the appeal to shared values, basic human rights, was also evident and clear. It was the genius of the civil rights movement's leadership to put the challenge in just those terms. Think of Martin Luther King Jr.'s constant appeals to the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and the Bible. Demonstrations also galvanized moral responses. When people were harassed, beaten, even murdered for trying to *vote*—when the whole world saw fire hoses turned on black children peacefully demonstrating for basic rights—it was clear that things had to change. In five years we had a Voting Rights Act and an end to *de jure* school segregation. Although racial equity remains a difficult and ongoing struggle, there is no question about the basic commitments.

“SHAREABLE TERMS” AGAIN

In response to sectarian religious dogmatism, chapter 3 insisted on *finding shareable terms*. The point here is the same, only broader. Common values do exist—in fact, arguably they are the norm. They can be drawn upon strategically for bringing values into congruence at many levels, from family trip destinations to demilitarizing the Sinai. But in the big decisions, they need to be especially clear and settled, and drawn upon explicitly and repeatedly.

And contrariwise, if you *can't* draw on such basic shared values, then it might be the better part of valor to reconsider a little. Certainly no group should try to make the community as a whole take on its particular or unique moral stances—even if that group strongly believes that its stance is the only right one—without a real give-and-take in which their views too are open to question, and without a broad consensus emerging as a result. Maybe it will, maybe it won't . . . but in any case the shared values must come first.

Even dogmatists might see the wisdom of this if they consider how many other dogmatists are out there who have just as fervent beliefs as they do but in different or opposite directions. Each side likes to demonize the extremists of the other—“Do you want *them* making the law?” No. But most of us don’t want *you* making the law either. You are welcome to try to persuade the rest of us—using good arguments, of course—but you need to listen too, and then we decide together. If we are ready! Otherwise, let’s honor democracy—let’s celebrate our shared communities whatever they are—and, well, keep talking.

READING 31

“Can We Talk? Understanding the ‘Other Side’ in the Animal Rights Debates”

ROGER GOTTLIEB

ROGER GOTTLIEB (b. 1946) is Professor of Philosophy at Worcester Polytechnic Institute and writes widely on political philosophy, environmentalism, ethics, religion, spirituality, the Holocaust, and disability. One of his recent books is *Engaging Voices*, a series of dialogues exploring some of today’s ecological issues and challenges with special attention to how we relate to each other and to others who differ from us, sometimes radically, in coming to terms with those issues. To what degree do both our differences and our difficulties in dealing with them—and in really hearing the “other sides”—stem from our own deep-lying uncertainties and fears, blocking not only constructive dialogue but the possibilities for making progress together, in more open-ended and integrated ways? And, when they do, how do we proceed?

The following selection has been abridged [by AW] from a much longer essay by Gottlieb of the same title, originally intended to be part of *Engaging Voices*. It returns to the issue of ethics and other animals, but from a quite different angle than we have so far considered. Take Gottlieb’s title seriously: *Can We Talk?*—or rather, *how* can we talk, not just civilly but productively—across what usually seem to be great divides in the usual animal rights debates? Gottlieb writes as an unapologetic animal rights sympathizer working, all the same, to come to terms with the real concerns—not just the surface arguments—of the “other sides.” Notice how he uses the strategies advanced in both this

Roger Gottlieb, *Can We Talk? Understanding the ‘Other Side’ in the Animal Rights Debates*. Reproduced with permission.

chapter and chapter 11: taking the “other side” seriously, understanding and affirming the genuine values and interests at stake for people advocating “positions” that can seem unbelievable or hard-hearted, and systematically looking for ways to bring values into congruence, rather than “win” a debate. Even on this sort of issue, the moral of the story is that sustaining argument and constructive steps forward are possible.

When you order a delicious Veal Parmesan at a fancy Italian restaurant you are consuming the flesh of a living being who had been confined in a cage so small that it could barely move, always in the dark so that its flesh would be pale, without any company (which it needs, being a social animal), and, to preserve the delicacy of its taste, never fed the solid food it requires.

Clearly there are all sorts of cultural reasons to keep eating that Veal Parmesan. It has been a delicacy for a very long time. It tastes great. People earn a living raising, cooking, and serving it. If you lean in the animal rights direction, as I do, it might seem pretty easy to dismiss all such defenses of veal by pointing out that slavery was culturally supported and that people made money off of the Holocaust. But this quick dismissal does not work when you are talking to someone who remembers how his family really enjoyed his grandmother’s cooking—whose heart opens in the memory of everyone sighing with pleasure around the dining room table; or who is paying for his son’s alternative medical treatments for debilitating asthma by working in at Ricci’s Italian Paradise. . . .

Yet it is very hard to defend the way veal calves are raised without saying flat out that the pain of animals is morally meaningless. This position says that we can cut down trees, dig holes in the ground, hammer brass—and in exactly the same way that we can do what we want to any animal that is not human. . . . People are the center of all things and the beings out on the periphery do not count for very much. Yet, interestingly, even people who believe this sort of thing typically do not believe it *completely*; and it is that lack of completeness which leaves an opening for the other side. For example: a good number of the veal parmesan eaters (or servers) doubtless have their own special, favorite pets that they would not dream of treating the way veal calves are treated: animals whose welfare, happiness and pleasure count for something. The fundamental inconsistency here—that the pain of our pets matters but that of our dinner does not—creates a deep logical hole that is very hard to climb out of.

So when we look at veal—and indeed meat eating generally—what we have is a deeply entrenched social practice which is, when

examined, pretty much without any moral justification. Whether or not this moral indefensibility extends to every other use of animals, such as hunting buffalo a thousand years ago, or to the Inuit peoples in the Arctic Circle who pursue seals now, or even to individual hunters with waterproof camouflage jackets and long distance rifle scopes taking a bead on some moose, is really beside the point. Right now, we are talking about mass produced animals who end up in shrink wrapped packages at the local supermarket.

What can the veal eater say in response? Not much, which is why his or her response is generally laughter, contempt, ignoring the truth, not looking at films of factory farms and slaughterhouses, saying “that’s just the way we do things around here,” and repeating “it tastes good,” as if that were sufficient *reason* to keep eating it. One usually gets a lot of attitude, but very little argument.

So if the cheerful meat eater does not want to engage seriously with an animal rights advocate’s claims that July 4th barbecues are like Nazi death camps, what are we to do?

Well, and initially this might seem to be beside the point, we can start by recognizing that the moral failure of modern meat eating is not the end of the story. For if the modern meat eater is doing something morally wrong every time she whips out her Visa card to pay for prime rib, she is surely not the only one who commits moral wrongs. . . . Indeed every animal rights activist, including the ones who believe that our mass consumption of animals is a kind of Holocaust, lives in a way that harms animals. Such activists drive their cars and plug into the power grid, thus contributing to the global warming that is eradicating countless species. Even a fully vegan diet involves large-scale agriculture that displaces animals. And when their children are sick, they do not reject “out of principle” medicines that have been developed through testing on animals. . . .

[T]here may be some comfort for both sides to be found in what is probably for most readers an unexpected source: the vegetarian perspective of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, who at his death in 1935 was the chief rabbi of pre-state Israel. As an esteemed leader of Orthodox Jewry, Kook functioned in a community in which meat eating—and lots of it—was the accepted rule. There was no way he could simply demand vegetarianism from his followers: the ruling would not have been understood, and certainly not followed. But Kook was not about to issue such a simple, absolute rule. In fact, he argued that biblical history showed that humans, though ultimately headed for a non-meat diet, simply were not capable of it yet. In Genesis God initially gives Adam and Eve only vegetable food to eat; after the “sinful generation” of Noah, however, God told them they could eat flesh “after all the desire of your soul.” At the same

time, however, as Kook pointed out, there are many biblical rules which restrict what and how we eat: we are not allowed to boil the kid in its mother's milk, or take the mother bird along with the eggs, or eat blood. There are foods that are forbidden. Thus the way we eat is a matter in which God's commands operate. It is morally significant and demands that we limit ourselves. These rules, said Kook, indicate that humans are involved in a very long process of moral development. This process starts with some restrictions on what we can do to animals. It will end up in an ideal of respect and care, including a refusal to use animals for food. We are not capable of the end point yet, but we are on the way to it.

One does not have to be an Orthodox Jew, or a religious believer of any kind, to appreciate the force of this position. One need only see that a partial improvement is better than no improvement at all, even in the realm of morality. And that the practical truth of any moral claim . . . is only as powerful as the level of moral development of the people we are talking to. No matter how right a moral claim is, if humanity is not ready to take in its truth, it will have no social consequence. Like so much else in life, the effectiveness of a moral truth depends on where we are historically and socially. . . .

How can we make all this at least a little better? This question has some resonance in the real world. For somehow there has been agreement on legal restrictions in some countries on how you can raise veal, and in other matters relating to animals as well. If these new laws are not enough for the moral vegetarian, I completely understand. But moral life is often, perhaps typically, not a case of "enough." It usually is, at best, a case of getting a "little bit better."

Here's another context: Your child has been born with Cystic Fibrosis, a generally fatal genetic condition in which a missing enzyme leads to lung and digestive problems. While CF used to spell a quite early death for everyone, recent research has now enabled many to live into their 30s and 40s.

If it is your child, doomed to a life of frequent lung infections, rounds of seemingly endless coughing, near constant chest physical therapy to clear the distinctly thick and immovable CF mucus, do you care how many lab animals have to die to find a cure, or even something that will enable your child to have a somewhat longer, somewhat more tolerable, life? In forty years the median survival age for CF has gone from 10 to 37. *That's* what you're counting, not the number of mice that were used up to develop treatments, and potentially a cure, for your child. . . .

Here we have what looks like a clear choice: allow a child to suffer and die young, or do what needs to be done for the human

at the expense of animals. If you are that parent—or the child himself—do you think you will put much stock in accounts of animal suffering?

Once again of course the Animal Rights defender can simply say that there is no reason to prefer the human to the animal. And questions of degree and scope can also be raised. How many animals would you sacrifice for a cure? A million? A hundred million? A hundred billion? And for what disease?—for one that afflicts some 300,000 in the U.S. like CF? For one that afflicts 300? Or 3? Is there no limit at all? . . .

Perhaps once again the only approach with a reasonable chance of success is to try to make things a little better. First, stop all the stupid, wasteful, even insane animal experiments: the ones that drip cosmetics into rabbits' eyes until they go blind; or that smash monkey's heads into walls to see if having heads smashed into a wall will injure the brain; or that test how long it takes to make animals crazy by randomly subjecting them to electrical shocks.

As for the CF experiments? Well, even if they are wrong, perhaps we could agree to talk about them later. Just as it would be an improvement, even if not necessarily good enough, to improve the living conditions of veal calves, so there is a lot that can be done to limit or eliminate animal experiments *before* we get around to stopping the research aimed at curing lethal illnesses.

In a moral life we are often faced with difficult choices. Sometimes these are really false choices, and we should make sure we know who or what has said "Choose between A and B." Maybe there is a C that would work out for us all—like preventive health measures to clean up the environment so fewer people get cancer from pollution, or teaching people to have better health habits so lifestyle diseases diminish. But at times, and sadly, there are cases when no way out of the painful alternatives is possible. "People are born to trouble," said Job, "as the sparks fly upwards." "Life," said the Buddha, "is suffering." We will have pain in this life, and so will everyone else, and no amount of moral goodness will ever take that away. Even the animal rights defender cares more for his own child than his own pet; or would be more upset if he ran over a neighbor's child than if he ran over a neighbor's dog. Just as the "I can do anything to animals I want" types might have pets they cherish, animal rights supporters still privilege people. That is one reason this issue of animal experiments is both very difficult and a place where agreement across real differences might be reached. . . .

Another argument often used in favor of eating animals is that animals themselves kill and eat other animals. So why shouldn't

we? To be honest, this is a concern it is often hard for me to take seriously. Yet I have heard it so many times from students and from people at my public lectures that my inability to see its force must signal a real lack in me.

. . . We are, say some hunters (at least the ones who want to talk about it), getting back into nature, experiencing the wilderness as our forbears did, tracking and killing in a primordial struggle that bonds us with the circle of life the way humans used to before we were made weak and decadent by civilization. There is a mystic connection between hunter and animal which all those who buy packaged hot dogs can never understand. And those of you who criticize hunting as a brutal celebration of death do not comprehend the respect, the love even, that passes between hunter and prey.

But if people truly want to experience the primordial struggle between hunter and prey, well then let them actually have that experience. Let them walk to wherever they are going to hunt, using weapons and wearing clothes they have made themselves. Let their total consumption of meat be dependent on the hunt and the hunt alone. No more \$200 boots and toasty down parkas. No going out for steak afterwards, or driving to the national forest for deer season. When today's hunters want to do try it this way, they will at least be more honest. I still might wonder why they can't commune with a living being without killing it; or have a bean salad and soy yogurt for dinner instead of venison. Perhaps they could connect to animals by tracking them, taking pictures, or writing poems. But until they make the real sacrifices needed to "get back to the primordial" their stated desire seems a little insincere. . . .

As attractive as a moral position seems initially, if you cannot live by it, it does not amount to much. By that I do not mean perfection. I am not suggesting that if we cannot love our neighbors as ourselves we should totally abandon the religions which tell us to; or that if we do not always take other people's rights seriously we should abolish the *Declaration of Independence*. I do mean that if we put forward a moral position which seems to require a certain amount of responsibility, and we are not willing to even try to live up to that responsibility in our own lives, we should not pretend it is really a something we believe in. It is pretty clear that our hunters will not live like Native Americans of a thousand years ago; and that the person who wants to live "like nature" will also want his or her own life and property protected by a moral code and a good police force.

Thus my arguments, I am convinced, win. But so what? Is that the best we can hope for in a moral conversation? Could it

be that there is something more important than my own knee-jerk rejection of moral stands I do not like?

I think there is. And here is part of it. Any widely held belief—even one that is inconsistent, poorly informed, or just dead wrong—almost always has some connection of vital importance to the people who hold it. If we truly are to understand one another, to develop our moral life through connected conversation with other viewpoints, and to create a moral community *together*, we must try to find out what it is that binds people to positions we completely reject.

At this point some people will point to revolutions or activist social protest movements and say *that* is how we should respond to moral evil, not by trying to find out what is vital and authentic in it. We do not need to “understand” Nazis, wife-beaters, racists, or colonialists—we just need to confront and defeat them. Indeed that may be the case in some situations, though it might certainly be argued that often a lot of unnecessary antagonism, self-righteous condemnation of other people, and outright violence slows things down or leads to a continuation of violence in the end. Maybe feminism in the U.S. would be further advanced now if the movement in the 1970s and 80s had showed more compassion for men, for example. Perhaps violent revolutions tend to create violent post-colonial governments. Maybe nonviolence—political and emotional—is a more effective, long-term answer to the problems of profound injustice. And maybe it is not.

In any case right now what I am concerned with is the process of *moral* life, sustaining a moral community, and trying to hear and be heard by people who may think very differently than we do. Here the goal is understanding and connection, not victory and correctness.

The hunters, and those who would think nature teaches us to act without moral limits, are both expressing, however indirectly, a yearning to find some source of value, meaning, and connection that is beyond the human. . . . In nature there is vitality, honesty, strength, and acceptance of fate. In nature the only masks are part of an evolutionary strategy, like the butterflies whose markings make them look poisonous when they are not. In nature there is no waste, and everything fits, and everybody’s death is someone else’s life—or at least so it may seem to those of us trapped by television, roads, bureaucratic regulations, the tax code, and email. . . .

If this speculation about the deeper motivations of people whose attitudes towards animals I reject are true, then there is a basis for some kind of communication. Even, perhaps for some kind of commonality and solidarity. For I too seek some wisdom and inspiration

in the realm of nature, and I too admire the clarity and integrity of animals. If I can see what is beautiful in what other people think and want, as well as what is wrong, I will have upped my chances at finding allies, and at least will have learned to be a little less angry, superior, and self-righteous. . . . And maybe I and the people whom I am so sure are wrong can join together on things we both support, like protecting wilderness. Better they should hunt and join Sierra Club to help protect the forest and the animals in it, than be so alienated from all the soft-hearted and morally superior environmentalists like me that they ignore everything but the next kill.

QUICK REFERENCE: WHEN VALUES CLASH

WHEN TRULY OPPOSITE VALUES CONFLICT, AT LEAST SPLIT THE DIFFERENCE

Both (all) sides can be, and often are, partly right. Even when we have trouble seeing what the other side is about, splitting the difference affirms and sustains the shared moral community. Here each side gets half, anyway, of what it wants.

FOCUS ON INTERESTS, NOT POSITIONS

Different values may still be compatible. Look beyond contending positions to try to *dovetail* the underlying interests: the core values. Often there are ways to satisfy both at the same time. Here each side can get more than half of what it wants—and again, shared community is served too.

WORK FROM COMMON GROUND

When disagreements are framed by deeper shared values, work from those shared values toward jointly agreeable resolutions. Each side might even get *all* of what it *really* wants. Rather than defining ourselves by our disagreements, highlight commonalities.

BIG DECISIONS

When the ethical decision involved has especially high stakes and major consequences, take special care to act from broadly shared and carefully articulated values.



FOR REVIEW

1. How does John Dewey characterize most moral conflicts?
2. Instead of asking which side is right, this chapter advocates asking what?
3. How could “both sides be right” in the assisted suicide debate?
4. According to this chapter, are conflicting values the norm? Explain.
5. What is “bringing values into congruence”?
6. What are three specific methods for bringing values into congruence?
7. What is “working from compatible values”? Give an example.
8. What is the difference between focusing on interests and focusing on positions? Give an example of “dovetailing values.”
9. According to the text, when should we “hold firm”—that is, *resist* bringing values into congruence?
10. Those big decisions—what special standards come into play?
11. According to the text, why did Prohibition fail? What’s the relevance of that failure now?
12. How does Roger Gottlieb suggest that we can make progress in animal rights debates?



FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

12.1 QUESTIONS

Why are we so ready to think that moral issues must be matters of “right versus wrong”? Why do we polarize values? Take some time with this question: the answers are not obvious at all, and there are many levels on which you might address it.

Many differences of moral values don’t bother us at all—or at least, most of us. We’re more apt to just find them fascinating, like differences in speech or sexual customs. Still, very serious values may be involved here. We don’t generally announce anymore that the work ethic, say, is “right” and any other way is wrong—yet work is one of the central projects of our lives. Chivalry is an ethic too—rooted in the medieval practices that also give us romantic love—but, again, we are not prone to moralize. A certain chivalry may be nice in a lover, but many people may as well prefer to do without. Why do we seldom worry or argue about “conflicts” of values in cases like these? Why do we not insist that these differences be morally sorted out too?

Quite apart from what you may think about the morality of abortion, do you think that a Supreme Court decision such as *Roe v. Wade* was the best procedure for resolving the question? What would have been a better one? Why? Apply your answer to emerging contemporary issues.

12.2 BRINGING VALUES INTO CONGRUENCE: LESS CONTENTIOUS ISSUES

Bringing values into congruence needs a *lot* of practice in ethics. It is useful to begin, though, with issues where they are at least a little more familiar: with certain non-ethical issues, or at least value issues that are not so hotly debated. These may be troublesome issues too, in the sense that they bring important values into conflict and readily produce polarized advocacy groups and debate. Still, they are generally understood to be open to intelligent discussion and even reasonable resolution. Certainly in most non-ethical cases it is less tempting to insist that only one or a few of the contending values are right and the others wrong, or that there is no other possible outcome beyond the total victory of one side. The point of this exercise is to remember the skills that are required to approach issues in that constructive way.

Here are some questions that might qualify:

- Should students who have moral reservations about dissection be allowed to opt out?
- Should health insurance pay for alternative medicine (e.g., massage, acupuncture)?
- Is driving a right, or a privilege? (Should we expect more driver responsibility than we currently do?)
- Should children's TV watching be limited?
- Should tax money pay for private-school vouchers?
- How can public schools approach controversial subjects such as creationism or sex education?
- How serious an offense to academic integrity is plagiarism?

For your practice, ask first what are the values that are competing here. What is each side speaking for that is important? Take some time with these questions—don't just name one value on each side. You know from chapter 4 that the real story is likely to be more complex.

Now bring your methods from their chapter to bear. Are there ways to "split the difference" in these debates? What ways? Can the relevant values be dovetailed? Is there common ground to be found? What new options then open up? As Roger Gottlieb might ask, Can We Talk about them? What does it look like when we do?

12.3 BRINGING VALUES INTO CONGRUENCE: CONTENTIOUS ETHICAL ISSUES

Now turn to more contentious ethical issues and apply the same methods to them. Pick some of the following questions to work on (or others of your choice):

- Is health care a right, or a privilege? (or something else?)
- Should we allow the testing of new drugs and other products on animals?
- Should hate speech be banned?
- Should pornography be banned?
- Are better-off people and countries obliged to do more to address world hunger?
- Is capital punishment ever morally justified?
- Should there be “capital punishment for corporations”—that is, dissolution of corporations that behave in flagrantly unethical or illegal ways?
- In an age of fears of terrorism, how far should individual rights be compromised for the sake of greater security?

I still recommend putting off the hottest-button issues, such as abortion, until you have had a lot of practice with others.

For clarity’s sake, start by identifying your position on each question (if you have one—but a definite opinion is not required, and indeed is not especially wise if you don’t know much about an issue). Now consider the opposite position—the other side or sides—or, if you’re not sure of your own, just consider the main contending views. Ask yourself what the other side(s), or each side, is right about—not wrong, but *right*. Where do you actually *agree* with them? What are their strongest and most important points?

It pays to go slowly here. Remember that bringing values into congruence begins with the acknowledgment that all sides very likely speak for something worth considering. This is already a hard habit to change, given the ways we usually debate ethical issues. When we get into contentious ethical issues, just the mere possibility that the other side has some points may be hard to acknowledge. Of course you don’t agree with their conclusions—or most of them—but it’s almost certain that you can still find common ground, or at least compatible interests. In fact, probably you even share *most* of the other side’s values, though you may give them somewhat different weights or rankings.

So what are those shared or compatible values? Take your time, be careful, and try to put them in a fair way.

For example, suppose you are thinking about capital punishment. Shared or compatible values might include:

- *Life* (both sides insist that life is precious, which is why murder is considered by both so heinous a crime, why the pro side thinks murderers deserve

death, and also why the anti side thinks that execution only doubles the crime)

- *Appropriate punishment* (since both sides condemn murder, both propose “ultimate punishments”: execution or life in prison)
- *Deterrence* (preventing future murders)
- *Fairness* (convictions must be fair; the execution of innocent people and racially tainted verdicts are wrong)

Can you come up with a similar list of shared or compatible values for the other contentious issues suggested above?

Please note: the task is not just to *describe* the other side’s view. It’s tempting to answer by just summarizing what you think they think. “They think this; they think that.” That’s helpful too, but the task here is to go much further. What do they think *that you think too*? What do you actually think they’re *right* about? Go beyond “I think . . .” and “They think . . .” to “*We* think. . . .”

If you’re in a group setting, a variation of this exercise is to make a list together of all of the relevant values that both (all) sides in some debate share. Usually you can come up with a very long list! That in itself should be surprising—and inspiring.

12.4 RE-WRITING BUMPERSTICKERS

Visit some parking lots and write down the bumperstickers on ethical issues you see. Look for a wide range, including the ones that infuriate you.

Now pay attention to the ways in which positions are misrepresented and common ground—shared values—is obscured. Look at the manipulative language, the appeals to authority, the insistence on finality and completely conclusive judgments. Of course, there is a limit to what can be said in a bumpersticker. But how often do we fall into “bumpersticker thinking” even when we could actually say something constructive?

Now take some of the issues that turn up in your survey and try to write bumperstickers that bring values into congruence instead. Is there a way to say something pithy that brings us together rather than divides us, that clarifies or connects rather than misrepresents and polarizes?

You will discover a great deal of pro-choice and pro-life sloganizing, for example. **God hates abortion**, they say. **Abortion stops a beating heart**. On the other side, **If you’re against abortion, don’t have one**. So it was an inspiration one day to see **Every child a wanted child**. Think of that: instead of trashing the other side for the evils of their ways, here is an appeal to the kind of value that unites us. It doesn’t insist on one “side” over the other; it reminds us of what we should all aim for in the end. Every child a wanted child—which means: women have both the right and the responsibility to regulate pregnancy. Every child a wanted child—which means: when pregnancy occurs, we need to do everything we can

to be sure the potential child is “wanted”—that is, that the family can sustain the pregnancy and the child. The whole issue appears in a different light—and as a collective responsibility, an invitation to try to better the world.

Another one I’d like to see: instead of the current **It’s a child, not a choice**, how about **It’s a child and a choice**? Here’s one I actually saw recently: **Pro-choice before conception, pro-life after**. I realize that this is meant to be “pro-life,” the way the debate is now framed, and even a little nasty. But doesn’t it have bigger possibilities?

NOTES

John Dewey is quoted from “The Construction of Good,” chapter 10 of his book *The Quest for Certainty*, widely reprinted, for example, in James Gouinlock, *The Moral Writings of John Dewey* (Hafner-Macmillan, 1976), chapter 5, where the quotation can be found on p. 154. The general theme of bringing values into congruence is thoroughly Deweyan, as Gouinlock’s collection makes clear. A previous treatment of my own on this theme is *Toward Better Problems* (Temple University Press, 1992).

On compromise, a careful philosophical treatment is Martin Benjamin’s *Splitting the Difference* (University Press of Kansas, 1990). Benjamin systematically contests the various arguments that ethical philosophers have offered (or might offer—the arguments are rarely spelled out) against taking compromise seriously as an ethical method.

Roger Fisher and William Ury’s book *Getting to Yes* (Penguin, many editions) is essential practical reading on bringing values into congruence: see especially chapters 2 and 3. See also Deepak Malhotra, *Negotiating the Impossible: How to Break Deadlocks and Resolve Ugly Conflicts (without money or muscle)* (Berrett-Koehler, 2016), and explore the University of Colorado Conflict Information Consortium’s “Beyond Intractability” project’s website at <http://www.beyondintractability.org/>.



GOING FARTHER #13

CLASS ETHICAL COMMITMENTS

Earlier chapters in this book offer opportunities to practice specific ethical skills in class together with your classmates: like minding the evidence (chapter 9) and attending to the many layers of moral values typically involved in contentious moral issues (chapter 4). The last two chapters do so especially directly. Dialogue skills (chapter 11) and bringing apparently conflicting values into some thoughtful congruence (chapter 12) are the epitome of skills that you can bring to discussion and joint decision-making, and so the classroom is not only a necessary but an extremely useful place to practice them systematically and energetically.

Here is one way to do so. Work out a set of *Class Ethical Commitments*: a set of rules and practices that will create and sustain the most ethical setting for your future class discussions and debates. Think of the class itself as an ethical community, in short: one that, for a short but intense time, you all inhabit together, and that you can therefore use to good effect not only to learn the information and skills offered by this book and other course materials, and indeed not just to practice those skills, but to make your class interactions themselves as ethical as possible—that is, to make a (possibly) quite ambitious ethics real, at least for class time and among yourselves. Your ethics class itself can thus become a kind of laboratory in ethical community.

Make your Commitments *specific*—that is, don't just repeat the general advice of, say, the last two chapters, like “seek common ground” or “slow down and listen.” Instead, figure out *how* you are going to do this in your specific class and setting. Some classes of mine, for example, finding themselves prone to interrupt each other or to talk over or at the same time as others in a free-for-all discussion, have set up “rounds” instead, in which each person has the chance (but not requirement) to speak in turn, one by one around the circle. Others have decided to pass a Talking Stick around the room, inspired by native people's practices briefly described in Chapter 12. In my most recent class the stick morphed quickly into a tennis ball that student facilitators or I could invoke when needed, tossing it to the next participant to speak (adding a useful motor dimension too), who then tossed it back, or along the circle, when finished. One of our Commitments detailed and affirmed this practice.

For another specific move, consider a student facilitator or co-moderator with the teacher, and/or a person whose role it is simply to attend to the dynamics of the conversation, making sure that participation is spread around fairly and that the process moves considerably but efficiently, keeping in mind all the rules and maxims of the last chapters, and/or agreed upon by the class. Probably this “Process Minder” will need the power to intervene to ask someone to rephrase or reword a problematic statement, remind people of the rules, etc. You may also be able to call upon trained teachers of facilitation on your campus to lead a workshop on facilitation skills for your class, and/or there may be regular ongoing facilitation trainings for all interested people on campus.

Your Commitments may cover many aspects of the class and its work together, as needed. Some of my classes give a good bit of attention to in-class texting, emailing, or

off-topic Web searching on laptops during class, for example, as well as other matters of (seeming) etiquette, like waiting to pack up until the instructor or student leaders explicitly close the class. In general, the question is: What kind of classroom etiquette does ethics ask of us, of you? And is it just “etiquette” in the sense of conventional politeness? From here you might find yourselves in a fruitful discussion of the ethics of being a student (remember that general question from the common exercises in chapters 5–8) or of civility in general—even when it may be “conventional.” Is it always?

You’ll also want to provide for ways to regularly revisit and add or revise your Commitments. Classes of mine have gone on to decide or negotiate grading schemes for parts of the class as well: with your instructor you may want to clarify how much is on the table, what is not, and why.

You may want to create your Class Ethical Commitments early in a class, or even at the very start, as a way of framing the basic questions of ethics itself. Or, if you wait to go farther in this way until later in the course, you can use the occasion as a review and application of what you have learned, as well as specifically a response to the last two chapters. Either way, for example, readings in Part II may prompt new rules as well as offering deeper understanding of the rules that come most readily to mind (e.g., the Golden Rule) while equally suggesting consideration, perhaps again in quite concrete ways, of new values that may not come readily to mind otherwise at all. After reading chapter 8, for example, one of my recent classes decided to open its daily session with statements of gratitude to “All Our Relations,” and to randomly appoint students each day to sit in special seats to speak for the future generations and the earth in our daily deliberations.

Added urgency if your class is moving toward a service project or ethical change project, in which everyone will be involved and which, among other things, will determine a good portion of students’ grades. The project focus itself, the goals of the work, and also the methods of grading of each student’s contributions are therefore of central concern to the students, and thus the rules by which all of these decisions will be collectively made are of central concern too. It is especially clear in this case that the shared commitments toward which the class begins by working are going to have real effect, quite shortly down the road: thus everyone gives that commitment-forming work their full attention.

This process may take some time. In my classes, at least, with student moderation and accommodation from me, it tends to take much longer than students expect. In my view, the process itself—and the very fact that it *does* take such a long time—is a key part of the learning, and I have faith that it will come back later to good effect, when we are in the midst of difficult and/or contentious decisions and we can manifestly and appreciatively draw on commitments we have laboriously worked out earlier. Other instructors may have other views, of course: this is another matter to be worked out by each individual class.

You will also have to consider how to establish the Class Commitments themselves in the first place, an interesting chicken-and-egg problem with real consequences. In particular, what is the Commitment or rule to be for deciding upon proposed Commitments? Must everyone agree? What if some do not? Is it fair to expect them to follow the rules anyway? Is there another ethical way to deal with dissension?

You could argue that someone who does not agree with the ground rules for a class can always drop the class, but this doesn’t seem entirely fair either, and besides, after a certain point in the term, dropping a class is no longer possible without penalty, or in some cases not possible at all. What then? Among other things, there are interesting “social contract” questions here that may remind you of some of the discussion of theories of justice in **Going Farther #7**.

Good luck!



Creative Problem-Solving

Creativity is the art of expanding possibility. It is the ability to cast a situation or challenge or problem in a new light and thereby open up possibilities in it that were not evident before. By way of illustration, chapter 1 offered the case of the second-grader who'd lost her hair due to chemotherapy and was being mocked by her classmates. What could her teacher do? You'll remember that rather than lecture or put down the class, the teacher shaved her own head, thereby completely transforming the meaning of a bald head in the class. Other students went home and begged to get their own heads shaved, in solidarity, and for the fun of it. Thus a situation that seemed completely "stuck"—to have few or no good possibilities—suddenly was alive with promise and good heart.

Mightn't it just possibly be the case that one or two other moral problems might also benefit from some creative thinking? Are we not also a little "stuck" here and there elsewhere in ethics as well? But I speak ironically: for today it seems to be almost a *definition* of a moral problem, in the usual view, that it is seriously "stuck." One of our most immediate associations with the word "moral," for example, is the word "dilemma": moral dilemmas. We are supposed to have two and only two choices—or anyway only a few—and often neither choice is much good. There are even ethics textbooks in which students are not assumed to have understood a moral issue until they have identified "the" dilemma that is supposed to underlie it.

Really? Are seeming moral dilemmas actually a fact of nature, so to speak, or might they instead, just as often, be a sign that we need more creativity in addressing real-life moral issues? What if there were powerfully creative ways of getting problems *unstuck*? These are creative problem-solving methods—and it turns out that there is a whole field of practice already devoted to them. It is time to add them energetically and unapologetically to our ethical toolbox.

A FEELING FOR POSSIBILITY

The key precondition of creative problem-solving is to recognize that there is much more "room to move" than we usually think in nearly all of our problems. Call this a *feeling for possibility*.

That second-grade teacher again: she never would have thought of any such unexpected and dramatic alternative if she had not already not had a sense that maybe, just maybe, there *were* such alternatives. *Then* she could begin exploring. This is what I mean when I say that a feeling for possibility is an essential starting-point, even before the specific creative methods this chapter will offer. Without it, one will never even get those tools out of the toolbox. *With* such a sense of possibility, you have the impetus to energetically look for them.

The psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg, briefly introduced in chapter 8, famously conducted his research on moral reasoning by confronting children with a series of moral dilemmas such as this one—the most famous—known as the “Heinz Dilemma”:

A woman was near death from cancer. One drug might save her, a form of radium that a druggist in the same town had discovered. The druggist was charging \$2000, ten times what the drug cost him to make. The sick woman's husband, Heinz, went to everyone he knew to borrow the money, but he could only get together about half of what it cost. He told the druggist that his wife was dying and asked him to sell it cheaper or let him pay later. But the druggist said “no.” The husband got desperate and broke into the man's store to steal the drug for his wife. Should the husband have done that? Why?

Kohlberg assumed from the start that Heinz really has but two choices: either to steal the drug or to watch his wife die. In fact he treated that assumption as so essential to moral reasoning itself that he and his associates systematically downgraded the responses of people (typically girls in his study) whose first instinct seemed to be to look for alternatives—another criticism that Carol Gilligan and others brought against Kohlberg's conclusions. Those girls apparently “just didn't understand the problem,” it was said.

But what if, instead, we consider the possibility that they understood it very well indeed—as an open-ended situation in which a capable moral engagement might in part consist, like that second-grade teacher's, precisely of looking for “out of the box” alternatives? Remember that chapter 9 introduced the fallacy of “False Dilemma”: picturing two or a few sharply opposed options as the only alternatives. What if supposed dilemmas like Heinz's are actually *false* dilemmas?

It is true, of course, that it can be useful and clarifying to sort out the ethical issues in the classic Heinz case. If it really comes down to a choice between saving a loved one's life and someone else's property rights, what should you do? However, it is surely not the most *practical* guidance to begin by assuming that we really do have such a dilemma. Why box ourselves in without even asking if there are other options? At least, let us not jump quite so enthusiastically into the “box” of the dilemma we seem to be given. Many philosophers hold that the very point of philosophy is to question all manner of assumptions that usually confine us—to find the “give behind the givens.”

What is this but to open up a sense of possibility where at first there seems to be none? And this goes, as we shall see, not just for specific supposed dilemmas like Heinz's but for the nature of ethics itself.

POSSIBILITIES

So let us for a moment take the classic Heinz dilemma—for if anything is a genuine moral dilemma, surely it is one—and actually ask if Heinz might have real options. Are there unsuspected possibilities in his situation?

Well, yes. Here are some of the ideas my students have generated using the creative thinking tools introduced in the rest of this chapter.

Maybe Heinz could offer the druggist something besides money. Maybe he's a good piano tuner, or a skilled gardener, or a chemist himself. Why not trade his skills for the drug?

Or again, is this drug actually scientifically tested? Apparently not yet. In that case, maybe the druggist should pay "Ms. Heinz" for, in effect, volunteering in a drug test.

Why is the druggist so inflexible, anyway? Possibly he needs the money to promote or keep on developing his drug. But in that case Heinz could argue that a spectacular cure would be the best promotion of all. Maybe his wife should get it free! Or Heinz could buy half the drug with the money he can raise, and then—if it works—ask for the rest to complete the demonstration.

Also, Heinz and his wife don't live in a vacuum. What about public aid? Where are their family, friends, community? Think of the appeals you see in hardware stores and community groceries, complete with photos, a town rallying to buy an afflicted kid a bone marrow transplant, another chance at life. Just this summer my little hometown on the Wisconsin prairie raised \$35,000 to buy a young man an artificial leg.

In short, Heinz—and his wife, and the rest of us too—*do* have a few more options, don't they? And how many other problems might be similar? How will we know, without re-approaching them with some creative skills in our toolbox?

Notice too: many of these suggestions do much more than merely bring forward some dramatic and unexpected practical options for Heinz and his wife—which is already a lot. They also invite us to think very differently about ethics itself. Just asking what Heinz should do overlooks the question of what the rest of us can do—and sometimes that is a lot more. Our job, in the end, is not so much to judge this alleged dilemma as to figure out how we can help.

A full-scale ethical resolution also challenges us to think about how we can prevent such dilemmas from even coming up in the first place. American health care reform continues to be controversial in the 2010s, but one of its widely-shared premises is that it is unacceptable to leave millions

of Americans susceptible to such impossible choices. Inevitably it is partly a political question. We need to work out better systems, better policies, more of a safety net. Here too we can and must take some responsibility for making the world a better place—not just judging someone else’s (say, Heinz’s) response to the world as it is.

CREATIVE EXPLORATIONS

We now begin a survey of specific methods for creative problem-solving in ethics. You are going to bring along your sense of possibility, of course, but now we get more systematic. Creativity is not just a matter of having some unaccountable flair for inventiveness. It is an entirely learnable skill—and most of all, it takes *methods*!

First up are a number of modest types of exploratory thinking. Modest, yes—but don’t underestimate them on that account. Slowly but surely they can open up unsuspected new ethical possibilities, and meantime they help prepare the ground for the more dramatic methods to come.

GET A FULLER PICTURE

First find out as much as you can about the specific situation that presents itself as an ethical problem.

Suppose someone put this question to you:

Terri Schiavo was on life support for 15 years, diagnosed as in a “persistent vegetative state” by most doctors. Was it ethical to remove her feeding tube and allow her to die?

You should answer, “Isn’t there more to the story?” This is a real case about which you can find out more, such as Schiavo’s actual situation: how she ended up on life support with such brain damage, what her family situation was, if there was any hope of recovery, and what her own wishes might have been in this situation. Precisely in such details we may find unsuspected possibilities in problems that on the surface just seem “stuck.”

You’ll remember that the reading from Spoma Jovanovic in chapter 11 offered more detail on this case. Spelling it out further, we begin to get enough detail to get a sense of where there might be room to move.

Terri Schiavo suffered severe brain damage from oxygen deprivation after cardiac arrest, leaving her on life support for 15 years in a condition diagnosed as an irreversible “persistent vegetative state” (PVS) by most doctors. Her husband, Michael, began efforts to remove her feeding tube and let her die, reporting that Terri had said several times that she would not want to

be kept alive in such a state. Terri had made no formal declaration of her end-of-life wishes, though, and her parents disputed her husband's report. The diagnosis of PVS was also disputed by her parents and a few doctors, and became the center of court battles and political debates. In the meantime Michael became engaged to another woman, fathering two children with her, but was unable or unwilling to end his marriage to Terri. He also won a large malpractice award, partly to be devoted to continuing to take care of Terri, but soon afterwards seems to have lost all hope for her. Her parents continuously sued to recover custody and declared that they wished to keep Terri alive almost regardless of what her wishes might have been. . .

The added detail makes the case stickier, yes—even gruesome. On the other hand, the very same detail opens up new possibilities that would not even have been on the horizon before. There's the point: we can already get much more creative than we could with just the first bare description.

If Schiavo had been kept alive, for example, various new therapies for PVS or near-PVS conditions might have been tried on her. If she recovered, wonderful, but even if not, testing new therapies might still “serve the cause of life,” as some of her defenders were so eager to do. There would have been a better reason to keep her going.

The fuller description brings husband and parents into the picture, which complicates things but again opens up new angles. My students insist, for instance, that Michael Schiavo needed to be able to move on. Fifteen years wedded to someone who cannot respond to you in any way is enough.

Terri's parents, though, seem to have taken a pretty extreme position too. So maybe what Terri really needed was a freshly appointed, and hopefully somewhat impartial, legal guardian. We have worked out ways of appointing relatively impartial mediators, even in very contentious cases. Why not extend them?

Finally, the fuller description also tells us that the case really turned on lack of clarity about Terri Schiavo's end-of-life wishes. Surely then, we should promote living wills: ways that people can declare their end-of-life wishes while still in full possession of their faculties. Apparently many people did fill out living wills after the Schiavo controversy hit the news—but we'd do well to make it an expected thing. An ounce of prevention . . . well, you know.

WATCH FOR SUGGESTIVE FACTS

Suggestive facts are those that open up whole new ways of approaching a problem. Keep an eye peeled especially for them.

It turns out that air conditioning is necessary in cars partly because roads heat up so much in the summer sun. How unfortunate, we might say! How badly planned! Reframe such little facts as suggestive, however, and you could be off and running. Couldn't we make roads that are less heat-absorbent?

Why not use different, less absorbent materials? Paint the roads white to make them more reflective (and more visible at night). Or couldn't we figure out something else to do with the heat besides just letting it radiate back into cars? Install pipes in the roads and pipe through water to warm it up for home heating or wash water? Generate electricity?

A few years ago I looked up the number of deaths caused by guns every year in America. The answer is about thirty thousand. This is a vastly disheartening number, in my view, but I already knew it was something like that. What surprised me was another figure that showed up along the way. Nearly half of these deaths are *suicides*. (Did you know that?)

This one number put the whole debate in a different light for me. True, the old argument is still there: the availability of guns makes impulsive killing easier, whether you kill yourself or someone else. But impulsive suicide is less likely than impulsive homicide: the inhibitions are greater, or maybe it's that we are just less likely to get murderously angry with ourselves.

I'm still leery about guns. But the fact that fifteen thousand people a year deliberately kill themselves with guns surely suggests a need not so much for gun control as for suicide-prevention programs. And since suicide prevention must ultimately mean giving people compelling reasons to live, what it really means is finding ways to make life more exciting and rewarding for everyone. I was led to a very new way of thinking about the whole issue. Notice also that *this* project, unlike the continuing debates about gun control, both works from common ground (chapter 12) and starts from a compelling moral vision (chapter 14).

GET HELP

Other people naturally have different perspectives and different experiences than you do. They can also help bounce ideas around, sparking a new one or making a rough idea better. Seek out friends who are willing to think in an exploratory spirit with you—and be such a friend to others.

Here is a short creative dialogue about the Heinz dilemma.

- A:** It's striking that we aren't told what "Ms. Heinz" herself wants to do in this situation. It's her life, after all!
- B:** Yeah, why is this even called the *Heinz* dilemma? I wonder what *she* thinks.
- C:** I don't—I have enough trouble figuring out what *I* think.
- B:** She could be quite ready to die. Heinz could be the one grasping for straws, desperate to do something, anything, like stealing the drug.
- A:** And landing himself in jail, where he's not going to do her much good either. She'd be better off trying to steal it herself.
- B:** You know, what if "Ms. Heinz" did steal the drug? She has less to lose, that's for sure.

C: Oh, sure—jail will do wonders for her health.

A: Actually it just might! Did you know that jails have to provide medical care for inmates? That might just be her ticket to the drug!

This is a brief but productive exchange. We catch sight of several new ideas. And it works for a very specific reason. A and B are consciously exploring, working toward some new possibilities together. Their sentences start with phrases like “I wonder . . .” and “What if . . .?” They bring in new knowledge. They prompt each other’s thinking along. Even in this very short exchange we get three or four new ideas and perspectives, ending with a really unique one: that “Ms. Heinz” could deliberately get herself arrested so that she’d have a legal right to the drug. Now there’s some real creativity!

But C is a foot dragger. He seems to think that his job is only to judge or to react to the others’ ideas, rather than add to them or develop or deepen them or even to offer an alternative. Reactions like C’s could derail such a conversation. But notice the spirit in which the others take them here. They keep right on thinking in a more open-ended way, while making a few bows toward C along the way, and even take his last remark in an unintendedly suggestive light. C helped out in spite of himself!

BRAINSTORMING

Though we speak loosely of “brainstorming” for any attempt at creative thinking, the idea has a specific origin. Advertising executive Alex Osborne invented it (in 1939!) as a deliberate process to facilitate creativity in groups. The key rule is to *defer criticism*. Welcome all new ideas without immediately focusing on the likely difficulties and problems. Give new ideas, still barely hatched, enough space to develop and link up with others, to pass around the room, to provoke other ideas in turn.

The other guidelines for formal brainstorming work are:

- *Hitchhike on others’ ideas.* Improve the last idea; or spark off it.
- *Wild ideas are OK.* No taboos; let the creative “juice” flow.
- *State ideas briefly, like telegrams.* This keeps the process flowing. You can always come back to expand the best ideas later.
- *Aim for quantity, not quality.* If you stop to try to develop the first good idea you have, you’ll miss even better ideas that may come along after you’ve really gotten going.

COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Do you know that there are some societies that will not tolerate leaving even a single person homeless? That many countries have both fewer restrictions on alcohol and dramatically fewer drunk-driving deaths? That for certain tribal peoples in North America no decision was settled until the people had heard from the animals?

Even the wildest (to us) arrangements have probably been normal for some group of people somewhere and sometime. Probably even now. Did they learn anything from this? Couldn't we—from them?

Well, of course. We are not the only people to think long and hard about life-and-death decisions, or marriage, or punishment, or justice. All sorts of people have been thinking about ethical problems for a long time. All sorts of answers have been tried.

Another method for creative problem-solving in ethics, then, is simply to explore some of those other answers: that is, to explore other approaches to the same problems, at other times and places. Find out how quite different people and societies have dealt with these issues. You do not have to agree with them. Nor is the point to instantly produce workable solutions. The point is to free up our thinking: to look at our problems from new directions, once again, to widen our sense of possibility.

You may discover that certain problems that seem utterly stuck to us may not be problems at all for other people or at other times. Abortion, for example, one of America's most divisive, painful and seemingly fundamental social conflicts over the past thirty years, is barely an issue in many other countries, and historically was not much of an issue even here. (It may feel that the abortion debate has been going on forever, but that is only because most of us aren't that old—and because we haven't really gotten anywhere.) Just by itself this background may not suggest any solutions, of course, but it does give us a sense of possibility and movement. Things aren't necessarily as stuck as they look.

Or take the much-fought-over issue of marriage. In Australia many couples live together in so-called "de facto" marriages: they seem to do about as well as the more official kind. The French have created civil contracts for same-sex couples, with the unexpected result that an even larger number of opposite-sex couples also opted for them. Some conservatives are now promoting a new and stricter kind of marriage too. Apparently marriage is not immutable for them either. Different arrangements are possible. Instead of struggling over the definition of one kind of marriage, maybe we should, well—diversify?

Comparing and contrasting may take some research. You need to look for contrasting views and approaches: that is, contrasting both to our own and to each other. Find the practical details, too. How do the French civil contracts work? How *do* other countries handle alcohol? How do native peoples manage to listen to the wolves and even the rivers and stones? How can very

potent hallucinogens be widely used but not addictive in intact indigenous cultures? Really, *how*? The detail alone is often fascinating; the practical lessons are sometimes vital; and above all we may come back to our own problems with an entirely new set of ideas.

CREATIVE PROVOCATIONS

Creative ethical thinkers also attempt some rather more dramatic kinds of exploration—methods of mental *provocation* as well. These are also, as it happens, the favorites of most creativity experts. Maybe they'll be yours as well.

INVITE EXOTIC ASSOCIATIONS

For better or worse, we are creatures of habit. If we always had to think things through from the beginning, we'd barely be able to get out of bed in the morning. But mental habits can also become mental ruts. We can get so stuck in certain ways of thinking that we barely are aware of them at all—so it's especially hard to realize that there may be entirely new possibilities right next door, so to speak, but invisible to us still. And therefore the task of creative thinking is to wake us up to them—even abruptly, as sometimes it may have to be.

Already in the last section you have been watching for suggestive facts and drawing on your friends for their different experiences and ideas. They can be sources of unfiltered and unfamiliar ideas. By way of a full-scale method, you can now take the same process much further.

Try this: generate a set of prompts or “provocations” in a random way, and then free-associate from there. That is, invite—even force—*exotic associations*.

For such “provocations,” your source can literally be anything: a dictionary, an overheard conversation, some images from your house or a book, a mystery, a magazine. If you're using words, it's best to have a source with a varied and rich vocabulary—a good classic writer, maybe—but in a pinch you can even take words or images from billboards along the freeway, or by turning on the car radio for two seconds, as I sometimes do if I am using this method while driving. Or look around the room you are in, right now (or out the window, or try to remember last night's dreams. . .).

The aim is simply to produce as truly different and varied a set of new ideas as you can. Now you really have a new, unfiltered stimulus for your thinking—from outside whatever “box” you are currently in. Right away something fresh. Then put it together with the problem you are thinking about. Don't censor, edit, judge. Give each association, however crazy it may seem, some time. What new possibilities, what new ways of thinking, might it suggest?

Take the problem of litter—of thrown-out cans and bottles for instance. We're used to hearing all about our responsibility to use trash cans, to recycle. Well, it's true, we should. But is that it? Nothing more to say? Could we think further and more creatively about this problem that is so familiar it's boring?

Let us try some exotic associations. Looking around, just past my desk, I see my houseplants. Alright then: could the image of a houseplant (that's random, eh?) suggest some new associations, different ways of thinking about discarded cans and bottles?

Now I free-associate . . . hmm . . . Well, houseplants do make the room more beautiful. So maybe . . . we could start making cans and bottles that are the same? Art made with "junk" can be wonderful; but we could imagine something more systematic, like juice containers made of different-colored plastic that can be joined Lego-style into kids' play structures, or faux stained-glass windows. Paper wrappers that could be used for origami?

Plants are also food—one way or another nearly everything we eat comes from plants. Well then: what if we associate edibility with can and bottle litter? Any usable ideas there?

How about . . . um, edible cans and bottles?

It sounds crazy at first—new ideas quite likely will. Many of them no doubt *are* crazy. But this one has some promise. Picture it: you could eat your food, then eat the wrapper to top it off. Drink your coffee and then down the cup too. Actually, we do this very thing already with some foods: think of tacos, or pita-wraps, or, for heaven's sake, ice cream cones. So edible food "wraps" are not even that unfamiliar. Couldn't we extend the idea?

Maybe there's something to this exotic-association method after all?

Plants . . . gardens? Bottles and cans in the garden . . . ? This may provoke yet another idea: bottles and cans as *fertilizer*? At least we could make cans and bottles so that they biodegrade really fast, couldn't we?

Keep going. . . . Suppose we add some fertilizer and grass seeds, or wild-flower seeds or something, and then, rather than discouraging "litter," encourage it instead. Don't stick those cans and bottles in the boring old bins; just throw them onto some bare ground, thank you. Or into your garden. Cans of tomato juice could have tomato seeds in them, apple juice bottles could contain apple seeds. . . .

We could go further with this, but you see the point. Even with a couple of seemingly unpromising associations, we are now thinking *way* out of the box about the litter issue. No more guilt-tripping about recycling—just eat the stuff. There's creativity for you!

NO FILTERS

How to pick useful provocations? The key point is, you can't select them in advance according to your hunches about what would be most relevant or helpful. That is exactly what you are trying to *find out* in the first place.

No—just try some different prompts and see what comes of them. The more “out of the blue” the better.

A good rule is: stick with any prompt, no matter how unpromising it seems, for at least three minutes (and use a timer: three minutes may be longer than you think). You won’t know what you can get from it until you try.

Trust the process. Don’t try to edit or filter or prejudge it—just give yourself over to it. Free-associating on the Heinz dilemma, for instance, I turned to the dictionary for random words, and the first word I found was “oboe.” “Oboe?” I said to myself. “You’ve got to be kidding!” Then I thought, well, an oboe is a musical instrument; an oboe-like instrument is used to charm cobras in India; maybe Heinz could somehow charm the druggist?

How? I’m not sure, but it seems worthwhile for Heinz at least to talk to the druggist some more. We shouldn’t assume the druggist is a completely boxed-in automaton, any more than Heinz is, or you or me.

Or again: people play oboes—it is a skill—people have skills—Heinz has skills . . . From here it might occur to us that Heinz could barter other things besides money for the drug.

The next word I found was “leaf.” Leaf: “Turn over a new leaf”? “Read leaves”? (Hmm—foretelling the future, as people used to do with tea leaves? How do we know that this drug is any good . . .?) Use leaves instead of drugs? (Are there herbal remedies . . .?)

If you absolutely must shape your prompts, seek out the wildest ones you can find. Oboes, leaves, OK, but what about *really* wild provocations, like going to the Moon, or lassoing a dinosaur, or the year 5000 CE. Skydiving? The circus? (Try them.)

BELEKZVIZ AND EXAGGERATIONS

Another way to provoke your thinking out of the usual boxes is to deliberately *reverse* certain features of the problem. Take for example the issue of animal dissection in schools: should students with objections be excused from animal dissection? Should animals be used in this way in the first place? Now think of the elements of this possibly problematic situation: students, curriculum, teachers, the specimen animal, and so on. Perhaps these could be interestingly switched around. What if . . . I don’t know . . . maybe students dissect the teacher? Come to think of it (which is really what we’re doing, isn’t it—helping ourselves to come to think of new things?), what if the specimen animal dissects *you*?

The moralist in you may be shocked, and you may want to quickly disavow any morally questionable or otherwise gross sorts of options. But again, don’t. Obviously we are not going to actually dissect a teacher or ourselves—but couldn’t this thought, taken as a provocation, open up some other interesting ideas, just around the corner?

One interesting new question is: how much can we learn from looking carefully at our own or one another’s bodies—maybe about blood flow, or

muscles and leverage? Think of how exercise machines are designed to isolate muscle groups. Truly, we could learn anatomy by paying attention to our own living bodies. And notice: studying our own bodies, live, would mean that we wouldn't need to use animals at all. Or we could study animals themselves *live*, rather than dead. Now there's a practical and fresh idea!

Yet another way to go to extremes is to *exaggerate* some aspect of the problem before you. Take some feature of it and make it as extreme, as overdone as you can. Then stand back and see what new ideas or perspectives it might provoke.

How do you exaggerate dissection? What I visualize is somehow literally going inside the animal. Not merely by methodically disassembling its remains with a knife in a lab but actually jumping inside its body.

Wild, eh? Impossible, of course. But hold on . . . couldn't we once again move from this "crazy" idea to something more workable? How about computer simulation? In fact, doesn't the computer open up all sorts of nifty possibilities, like shrinking yourself down to the size of a cell and touring a living body through the veins (or lymphatic system, or bile ducts, or . . .) or tracking changes in the body over time or in different activities (sleep, exercise, sex, alarm . . .)?

Along these lines, here's my suggestive fact for the day: already in use are jellybean-sized "camera pills" that can pass through the stomach and intestines scanning for tumors or infections. Next up are even smaller and remote-controlled versions that can also collect cell samples and administer medication. Soon enough we should be able to send them through the blood as well.

So really, in the long run, we might not even need computer simulations: we can tour our own bodies *in fact*. We need only expand the use of "camera pills" from diagnosis into the schools. We can explore our very own bodies as living laboratories. Students can explore one another's stomachs, bad knees, you name it, from the inside. Kids will love this! And who would need dissection then?

THE "INTERMEDIATE IMPOSSIBLE"

Here is my favorite method: what the creativity guru Edward DeBono calls the *intermediate impossible*. It is very simple. Start by imagining what would be an ideal solution to the problem. Then, once you've imagined a "perfect" outcome, however unrealistic it might be (or seem), you can work your way back to more realistic ideas.

Key is to make your very first imaginative step a really big one. It is far easier to tone down an ambitious idea than to try to ramp up a timid little half-step idea into something bigger. Instead of asking if we could make a half-decent dinner out of the leftovers in the fridge, for example, my family might ask what would be the perfect menu for the night, and then consider how close we can get to that menu given the odds and ends in the fridge or other things in the garden or that we could easily get. Again, you see the

logic: don't let the imagination be confined to tweaking a few bad options. Figure out your actual heart's desire first—*then* see how close to it you can get. It will not always work, but at least you will regularly get some big and fresh breaths of imaginative air. I can certainly report that we have much more inventive and satisfying dinners as a result.

Usually we just ask whether assisted suicide should be legalized or not. Both choices offer themselves as, at best, "lesser evils." But what would be a *radically* better solution here? Immortality wouldn't hurt, of course: just get rid of death. Not likely . . . and perhaps not always so ideal either. Taking death itself to be unavoidable, though, one radically better kind of solution might be for people at least to be able to choose their dying in some way that is not so secretive, passive, and (at least in some people's eyes) shameful. One "ideal" solution in this sense might be a *heroic* death, like carrying out some sort of suicide mission—in space, undersea, in places where those who want to survive can't go—or (a step more "realistic") volunteering to test a new drug or medical procedure. Not that this could be made a requirement: but the idea does, immediately, give us something dramatic and new to work with. Ideas begin to flow.

Once you practice the intermediate impossible, you will quickly discover that in many cases we do not really know what a "perfect" solution to our problem would be. Often we just fall back into complaining, or fighting against something we don't like, instead of carefully working out what we might want instead. If we did, maybe we would discover that it is not so different from what we've got already. For example, in the case of a "heroic death," there is still pain—maybe even more pain—and death itself, yet the feeling around them might be utterly different. Where there is a debate or controversy, we might even discover that our ideal solution is not even so different from the other side's ideal. Or perhaps it might turn out to be dramatically different from anything either side had imagined before. Once again, you won't know until you have (seriously) asked.

REFRAMING PROBLEMS

It is one thing to try to solve a problem more or less in the terms in which it is presented. However, we may also try to rethink and transform the very problem itself. It's at once a more challenging and a more intriguing and promising strategy. Thus there is a still a deeper level at which to engage creatively with seeming moral dilemmas and other issues. Let us call it *reframing* problems.

THINK PREVENTION

One method for reframing problems is to try to head them off: to prevent them from even arising in the first place, at least in so difficult a form. In short: *prevention!*

We understand the logic of prevention when it comes to health. Everyone knows that it's better to take vitamins and exercise than to wait until you get sick and then have to deal with the illness. In ethics, then, the strategy is just the same: look before or behind a problem as it is usually presented. Don't take "the" problem for granted. Instead, consider whether it even needs to come up in the first place. Ask whether a few strategic changes a few steps back can change everything about "the" problem here and now, or perhaps even keep it from coming up at all.

Take "the drug problem." It's a large and puzzling issue. By way of response, though, we are usually invited to consider only tougher law enforcement or drug resistance training. Sometimes "the" drug problem is even reduced to the question of how to get dealers off the streets. Longer jail terms, mandatory sentencing, more police.

Once again, we need to ask: what is the bigger challenge? Are there ways to rethink and shift "the" problem itself? Why, in particular, are so many people tempted by drugs in the first place? What combination of social pressures, hopelessness, the wish to experiment, and so on, are at play, perhaps on the part of different people and with respect to different drugs?

Surely part of the allure of drugs is that they offer some excitement in the midst of an otherwise uninteresting life. Then one bottom-line reconstructive question is: are there less lethal ways to make life interesting? Yes, obviously. Well, what ways? What can we do to make life so interesting that people are no longer tempted to escape through drugs?

Now *there's* a fine question—an empowering, strategic question: no longer punitive, widely engaging, open-ended, more promising for all of us. Here too, of course, the old questions remain—but they are no longer the only questions. A new sense of freedom opens up, and maybe of hope as well. Surely we're *all* interested in exciting lives!

Similarly, as we noted at the start of this chapter, the Heinz dilemma poses a compelling question that seems to require a yes-or-no, one-or-the-other sort of answer—while all around and before and beside it are a number of other, more intriguing and also more unsettling questions to ask, and other directions our thinking might go. Answering "the" original question is important, for sure, but that's only a beginning. Oughtn't we be asking about the design of the whole health care payment system as well? Why does the sick woman have no insurance? Why can't public assistance help her? If either insurance or public assistance was a real option, Heinz's dilemma would not even come up.

And what are the causes of her illness, anyway? The American Cancer Society estimates that 80 percent of all cancers are environmentally caused. So perhaps we have here a workplace issue or a diet issue, or polluted air or water? How could we leave all of this alone, as if the whole problem were just Heinz's, or rather his wife's?

Indeed this may be the best response of all to the original Heinz problem: that there is *no* good solution to the problem as it stands—and therefore the best thing we can do is to try to prevent such dilemmas from even coming up at all. The best strategy is to “look upstream,” to head it off next time, or to try to transform it into something more easily manageable. These in turn may well require structural change, rethinking and trying to reconstruct and indeed reframe larger social arrangements: insurance, public provision, how medicine itself is organized, workplace safety or environmental protection. No simple answers—but good work to do. (More on this in **Going Farther** #15.)

It is true that large families of moral values also seem to come into conflict here. This is why the Heinz dilemma is widely used by moral theorists to illustrate the difference between a consequence-oriented moral theory like utilitarianism, which might support stealing the drug, and a theory of personal rights, which is often supposed to favor the druggist. But this needn't be the end of the matter either. If we care so deeply about both consequences and rights, oughtn't we try to redesign our institutions *in general* so that these two families of values conflict less often or less viciously? How hard would that be? Reconciling rights and utility is arguably one of the aims of modern systems of public provision. So perhaps it is time to begin to work out new ways as well.

REVISIT OUTLYING PARTS OF THE PROBLEM

In a well-known riddle, a truck stands before a highway overpass, half an inch too high to get under. How to get through? Most people focus on somehow raising the bridge. But the answer is not to raise the bridge. It is to lower the truck—readily done just by letting some air out of the tires.

Confronting an obstacle, we're tempted to charge right into it, tackle it head-on. If there are major hurdles, we prepare to jump them. But a straight line is not always the best way between two points. What about running *around* the hurdles, using a side door, finding another way? This is what Edward DeBono calls “lateral thinking.” I prefer a more descriptive label: *revisiting outlying parts of the problem*.

The method is this. Systematically survey all the parts of a problem, not just the one or two that currently fill the screen. Highlight and reconsider each part of the problem. Each can be deliberately varied and questioned. New possibilities will come up. It may well be that some other aspect of a problematic situation, pushed into the background at the moment, offers us a way to go forward, while the current routes seem blocked.

Emmanuel Evans ran a department store during the 1940s and 1950s in my city, Durham, North Carolina. The store had an attached sit-down cafeteria. Segregation-era laws forbade the seating of black people in such eating establishments. Black people had to stand, get their food, and go outside to eat. Evans was unwilling to treat his black customers in this way. But what to do? The direct approach—seating black people in defiance of the law—would

quickly end with fines and jail (remember, this was before the civil rights movement and the era of mass civil disobedience). Closing the cafeteria served no one's interests either.

So the direct approach was blocked. What about an indirect approach? Mightn't the problem yield to an approach from another angle? Think about it . . .

Naturally we first imagine changing things for the black customers. But suppose things could be changed for the *white* customers instead? Couldn't white people (also) *stand*? Evans finally realized that he could just remove *all* the tables, so that no one was seated. Which is what he did. No law was broken, but a powerful statement was made. His cafeteria became the first desegregated eating place in town. And Evans, by the way, later became one of Durham's best-loved mayors.

Environmentally too there are many examples of "lowering the truck," shifting the action to readily solved problems rather than beating our heads against immovable obstacles. Rather than building ever more electrical generating capacity, for example, it is usually far easier and quicker, as well as far less expensive, for power companies to promote conservation. Some even give away high-efficiency lightbulbs. Instead of building more reservoirs and sewage systems, cities can promote water conservation. Low-flush toilets can reduce water usage and sewage flow by an astonishing 80 percent. Native plants that don't require watering at all reduce lawn water needs by, well, 100 percent . . .

LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES IN THE PROBLEM

A third and still more dramatic way of reframing problems is to take the problem before us not as a difficulty to be overcome or gotten rid of but as an actual *opportunity* to be welcomed. Believe it or not, instead of trying to get rid of "the problem," we can ask instead how we can make *use* of it—and not, or not just, as a "problem," but as a resource, as a solution already, if we can just find the right problem for it or reframe the one in front of us.

The method itself is, once again, very simple. Take any problem. Seek out the very core of the difficulty. Identify it, state it clearly. Then ask yourself: can I think of any way in which this "problem" might actually be *welcomed*? For what problems is this "problem" a potential *solution*?

Power plants produce, among other things, heat. Big plants build huge cooling towers and locate where they can discharge large volumes of hot water. The heat, in short, is considered a problem—a waste. And so it becomes. But then again . . . isn't heat often just what we want? Why consider it "waste" at all? Couldn't it be used for something? Suppose for instance that we piped the hot water or steam into homes for heat. In fact this is already done in Scandinavia, where they speak of "co-generation." The power plant becomes a heating plant as well. Viewed ecologically, the co-generated heat is not an inconvenience and a burden, to be dumped as cheaply as possible into the environment, but a *resource*.

Go to any old-age home and you will find people desperate for something constructive to do. There are some organized games and other activities, but the feeling is simply that time is being filled. Professionals are even trained and hired to find ways to keep the occupants busy—disguising what we normally assume to be the simple fact that really there is “nothing for them to do.”

I am sure that you can readily think of some creative responses in the usual problem-solving mode. Creating or adapting computer games for older people? (A rather large market, you’d think.) Or how about more crafts? And these are fine ideas. They are also still entirely in the mode of solving the problem as it stands: filling up old people’s time. A seriously creative approach would be to ask what their unfilled time is an opportunity for. Is it really a problem, at all, we’d want to ask—or, once again, more like a *resource*?

Ask the question in this way, as radical as it may sound, and everything looks different. *Of course* it is a resource! Obviously most older folks aren’t going to be blazing wilderness trails or hanging telephone lines or sheet rock or something. Surely, though, there are many ways that they can contribute. Here we have skilled, experienced, patient people, anxious for some constructive work... why should it be hard to hook their abilities up with community needs?

Nursing homes could be connected with public libraries, and the occupants take over cataloging and book care. It’s good, careful, and quiet work—plus they’d have all the books and videos they want close at hand. Older people could take over or create community historical museums. In almost all tribal and traditional communities, the elders are the custodians of the community’s history. They carry the memories and instruct the young. Why are we letting both the elders and the history slip away?

Even better, we know that many young parents are desperate for good-quality daycare. Once again buildings are built, sometimes right next to the nursing home, where staff are once again trained and hired, this time to find ways to keep the children busy and maybe even teach them something. Hopefully not just watching TV. But why not bring the very young and the very old *together* in a setting in which both can help each other? The old can tell their stories to the very people who above all love stories. And the young can help tend to the needs of the old, learning something of life cycles and of service in the process.

In traditional societies, the older generations are also the natural custodians not just of the past but also of the *future*. Freed from the immediate pressures of survival, reproduction, and work, having lived long enough to glimpse the grander flow of time, older people can take a longer view of things. Perhaps a little forgetfulness also helps. (Could memory loss even be an *advantage* in certain ways?) The old are the ones, freed up precisely by the changes that age brings, who can become society’s greatest visionaries! A colleague of mine is hard at work creating councils of elders who take visionary thinking as their project, indeed their responsibility. He’s creating a new kind of retirement community as well—as natural homes for such councils. A core group of

elders would live in such places and regularly host wider groups, of all ages, for facilitated visioning. Elder communities as creative incubators of the future—a beautiful and unexpected vision. We'll return to it in the next chapter.

Reframing problems in this way does take some imaginative effort. Usually it will not be obvious at first what the seeming problem could possibly be an opportunity for. Often it will seem silly even to ask. Patience, patience... Just ask anyway: “Even so, even so, what *could* it be an opportunity for?” Use the tools from previous chapters to help generate some concrete ideas. Stick with it. Don't be blinded just because a situation is *labeled* a “problem” (or “dilemma”). There will still be possibilities in it. The essential step is your willingness to look for them—your expectation that maybe, just maybe, there might be something to be found.

QUICK REFERENCE: METHODS FOR CREATIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING IN ETHICS

CREATIVE EXPLORATIONS

- Get a fuller picture. Find out as much as you can about the specific situation; look to the details to suggest new ideas.
- Watch for suggestive facts.
- Get help. Brainstorm!
- Compare and contrast. Explore how the same problem is treated in other places and times.

CREATIVE PROVOCATIONS

- Invite exotic associations. Seek unfiltered “provocations” in random words, analogies, or images; free-associate from there.
- Reverse or exaggerate key features of the problem.
- The intermediate impossible: start with “ideal” solutions and work back toward realism.

REFRAME THE PROBLEM

- Think prevention. How did this problem arise in the first place, and how can it be prevented from arising, or arising in so difficult a form, in the future?
- Revisit outlying features of the problem. Imaginatively vary all the changeable aspects of a problematic situation. What new possibilities arise?
- Look for the opportunities in the problem. What if “the problem is the solution”?

**FOR REVIEW**

1. What is a “feeling for possibility”?
2. What are some unexpected options in the Heinz dilemma?
3. What is an example of “suggestive fact”? Give an example from your own experience.
4. What is the key rule for brainstorming? Why?
5. “Compare and contrast”—what could be creative about that?
6. How can you “invite exotic association”?
7. Why shouldn’t you pre-filter your “exotic” prompts?
8. Illustrate “reversal” and “exaggeration.”
9. Illustrate the “intermediate impossible.”
10. Illustrate preventive thinking.
11. “Revisit outlying parts of the problem”; explain.
12. Illustrate how a moral problem can be taken as an opportunity.

**FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

13.3 ANOTHER FAMOUS DILEMMA

This chapter began with the Heinz dilemma, a case that philosophers have found so difficult that it became a classic example of an ethical dilemma. Here is another—we could probably even say *the* other—famous modern moral dilemma. The French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre described a young man in occupied Paris during World War II who came to him for advice.

His father was on bad terms with his mother, and, moreover, was inclined to be a collaborationist [that is, he cooperated with the Nazis]; his older brother had been killed in the German offensive of 1940, and the young man, with somewhat immature but generous feelings, wanted to avenge him. His mother lived alone with him, very much upset by the half-treason of her husband and the death of her elder son; the boy was her only consolation.

The boy was faced with the choice of leaving for England and joining the Free French forces—that is, leaving his mother behind—or remaining with his mother and helping her to carry on. He was fully aware that the woman lived only for him and that his going off—and perhaps his death—would plunge her into despair. He was also aware that every act that he did for his mother’s sake was a sure thing, in the sense that it was helping her to carry on, whereas every effort he made toward going off and fighting was

an uncertain move which might run aground and prove completely useless. . . . He was faced with two very different kinds of action: one concrete, immediate, but concerning only one individual; the other concerned an incomparably vaster group, a national collectivity, but for that very reason was dubious, and might be interrupted en route.

Imagine that this young man came to *you*—a well-known creative thinker—for some help in this situation. Do you see any options for him? Take your time, and use the methods in this chapter.

13.2 PROBLEM-SOLVING PRACTICE: NON-MORAL PROBLEMS

Pick some specific practical problems in your experience—you could start with your school or region—and challenge yourself to multiply (let's say, by ten) the number of options usually considered (if any). For practice, pick non-moral or mostly non-moral issues first. Don't over-evaluate the options you generate—this is just practice—but do aim to greatly expand and diversify the range of options usually considered.

Be sure to practice *all* of the different methods in this chapter. Keep your "Quick Reference" (p. 447) close at hand. You will have to do this deliberately and systematically: otherwise it will probably be too tempting to fall back on only a few methods, of only one sort, or just to work "off the top of your head." (Trust me: I have seen this happen too many times.) So, again, do not just brainstorm for a minute and then go on; and don't be satisfied with the first five ideas you come up with using any method, either. Better to think that you have only just scratched the surface. Now, *double down*. See how much farther you can go when you use each and every one of the methods offered in this chapter, and when you give each of them some good time. It may feel forced and awkward at first, but once you see how far they can take you, I promise that you will want to use these methods for every problem, moral or not, that chances to come your way.

Here are some sample problems to get you started.

- Waste (styrofoam cups, lights left on all the time, recyclables in the trash, overuse of paper . . .)
- Too much television
- Bad cell-phone etiquette (loud public conversations as if no one else were present)
- Sports teams that have to travel increasingly long distances to find suitable competition
- Parent–teen relations (they don't have to be so conflicted, surely—and they aren't, in some families and some other cultures: what could we do differently, better?)

- “Empty nest syndrome” (you eighteen-year-old college students may not be thinking about it, but I bet your parents are)
- Lack of affordable child care for working families with young children
- Lack of inexpensive travel options (for college students, and for everyone)
- Poor diets (predictably leading to health problems, missed work . . . and unhappiness in general)
- Rising waters and changed rainfall patterns (usually toward more intense, if fewer, storms) due to climate change. Think of cities on the edge of seas and rivers—New Orleans is only one of the more visible. What is to be done?

13.3 PROBLEM-SOLVING PRACTICE: MORAL PROBLEMS

I hope Exercise 13.2 persuaded you—if you needed persuading—that you yourself can be a very creative thinker with the right tools and some persistence in using them. Now it is time for the moral challenge. Following is a list of familiar moral problems, some we have already been discussing and some new. Your challenge is to multiply and diversify options in exactly the same way.

Remember the further instructions from Exercise 13.2. Be sure to practice *all* of the different methods in this chapter. Do this deliberately and systematically. Do not just brainstorm for a minute and then go on; and don’t be satisfied with the first five ideas you come up with using any method. Instead: double down. You are quickly going to go beyond ideas that are familiar to you from what you may know of the usual moral discussions of these topics. *Welcome* this: it means that you are succeeding at thinking creatively about this problem!

- We struggle with how to respond, person to person, to people asking for money in the streets. We want to help, we say, but have also learned to wonder what the money is really going for. Some of us give a dollar anyway—how can you turn away? Others make it a policy to refuse. Couldn’t there be some rather different ways of meeting the situation? (Hint: What if what’s given isn’t money?)
- Irresponsible driving. For example, speeding, poor attention, uninsured or underinsured driving, poor car maintenance; and so on. In handling a car, we have immense potential to harm or take others’ lives. How can we take this responsibility more seriously?
- The average age of first sexual intercourse is under 16 years for American teens, the lowest age of any major industrialized countries. It seems a bit young. (Is it? Why?) Meanwhile, the United States also has a much higher teen pregnancy rate than most other industrialized nations and a vastly higher STD rate. (Why?) Any ways to change our angle here?

- Marriage. With a 40% + divorce rate for new marriages, the institution of marriage is not working very well today. Quite apart from recent contention over same-sex marriages, marriage has plenty of issues, such as widespread lack of relationship skills, lack of supportive extended families or communities, many people's resistance to asking for help or counseling, and economic and other stressors, including the need to care for aged parents. What can be done?
- Drug abuse. As the text points out, we say that drugs offer an escape from school or work or just life itself, but this leads to other questions, like why so many people need such an escape in the first place, and what we might do about school or work or life itself so that such an escape is less tempting. So . . . ?
- Another drug issue: the "performance-enhancing drugs" used, and abused, by some athletes. High school and even younger athletes risk their health for an unnatural (and unfair) edge. Meanwhile, on a global scale, the World Anti-Doping Agency (great name, huh?) polices competitions such as the Olympics. Other competitors want to stay drug free but to compete on a level playing field. Any other ways to approach all of this?
- Exercise 1.2 in chapter 1 posed the question of "creative anti-racism," starting again from the teacher who shaved her head in solidarity with a young student who was being singled out for having lost her hair to chemotherapy—a dramatic gesture that was also very creative. You considered some other strategies there. Now consider them again with the tools from this chapter. Can you think of similarly unexpected and dramatic ways to highlight and challenge racial injustice and prejudice?
- Gun control. Surely there are a few options besides "yes" and "no"—even the degree of gun control we have now is far more complex than that. Going farther, what might you think up? Find some data here, for example, on gun use in other countries as well as how guns are or aren't legally regulated elsewhere. What can we learn from other countries' practices, either to copy or avoid or adapt?
- Sweatshops. We know that our clothes and other consumer goods are sometimes made by unjustly exploited workers in other, desperate parts of the world (and sometimes right here at home)—though often we don't wish to know (or can't find out) more details. What can be done to respond to this problem?
- Chapter 4 briefly considered a few arguments for and against a minimum wage: for raising it, against having it at all. Can you think of any other approaches to the issue of low- and underpaid work? While you're at it, consider that there are also people who get paid tens of thousands of dollars per hour, if you break their salary and bonus packages out down to an hourly rate. Could there be a moral case for a *maximum* wage as well? Or—once again—can you think of other and better approaches to this whole issue?

- Defenders of the death penalty argue that murderers forfeit their own right to life, that execution is the only really “proportionate” penalty for murder, and that the threat of execution deters would-be murderers from committing the act. Opponents argue that if cold-blooded killing is wrong, it is wrong when the state does it too, when the blood’s even colder; that life in prison is at least as appropriate a penalty; and that the threat of execution does not deter real murderers. As we saw in chapter 9, American states that use the death penalty do not, on average, have lower murder rates than states that don’t; some actually have higher rates, though it could be argued that they would have had higher rates anyway. Hard to know. How else could we think of this whole issue?
- What happens when personal ethics conflict with organizational practices: say, in business or the military or government? How could such conflicts be better handled? Are there new and creative ways to deal with the problem of “whistle-blowing”—and (better yet) the kinds of problems that lead to the need for whistle-blowing in the first place?
- People who disagree profoundly with important political and social decisions need some way to visibly register their disagreement and attempt to sway others to their point of view—in short, to protest. But what is the best form for such protest? Too many of the current forms of protest are so obviously pushed into invisibility or irrelevance that the protestors become embittered and cynical—or turn to violence. (Witness the fringes of the anti-abortion and anti-logging movements, for just two examples.) See if you can imagine healthier and more productive forms of protest. What would be two steps toward making them workable?

NOTES

There is a huge literature on creative problem-solving, but most of it addresses non-moral issues and contexts, such as management and design. For a range of approaches to problem-solving broadly conceived, see Edward DeBono, *Serious Creativity* (HarperCollins, 1992) and *Lateral Thinking* (Harper, 1970); Barry Nalebuff and Ian Ayres, *Why Not? How to Use Everyday Ingenuity to Solve Problems Big and Small* (Harvard Business School Press, 2003); Charlie and Maria Girsch, *Inventivity* (Creativity Central, 1999); and Marvin Levine, *Effective Problem-Solving* (Prentice-Hall, 2nd edition, 1993). Also widely discussed is the idea of “proactive thinking”: looking ahead to potential problems and working now to head them off later—as opposed to “reactive thinking,” which waits until they arrive as full-blown problems and then struggles to find some response. My suggested maxim is “Think prevention.” See Stephen Covey’s classic *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (Simon and Schuster, 1990), Habit 1. Covey subtitles his book *Restoring the Character Ethic*. Proactive thinking for him is a moral virtue!

Two books of my own specifically on the subject are *Creative Problem-Solving in Ethics* (Oxford, 2006), which mostly covers the same ground as this and the next chapter, and its sister, *Creativity for Critical Thinkers* (also Oxford, 2006), which you might find a helpful complement. Moral philosophers who might want a bit more about my treatment of the Heinz dilemma as a false dilemma should consult pages 556–558 at the end of this book. Philosophers who want more argument for the importance of reframing problems might also consult my book *Toward Better Problems* (Temple University Press, 1992), where it is mostly called “reconstructive thinking,” using John Dewey’s term. The classical source is Dewey’s *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Beacon Press, 1948). See also Caroline Whitbeck’s article “Ethics as Design: Doing Justice to Moral Problems,” *Hastings Center Report* 26 (1996): 9–16.

On the origins of brainstorming, see Alex Osborne’s *Applied Imagination: Principles and Procedures of Creative Problem-Solving* (Creative Education Foundation, 1993). Another useful way of organizing (and remembering) the creative-thinking methods introduced here, as well as some others, is the SCAMPER mnemonic: see <http://people.bethel.edu/~shenkel/PhysicalActivities/CreativeMovement/CreativeThinking/Scamper.html>.

In exercise 3.1, Jean-Paul Sartre is cited from his *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (Philosophical Library, 1957), pp. 24–25.



GOING FARTHER #14

CAN THE ABORTION DEBATE BE REFRAMED?

The issues we explored in chapter 13 are certainly not easy ones. On the contrary: we've looked at assisted suicide, the Heinz dilemma, the drug issue, and others. Each turns out to have unexpected creative possibilities. Yet there is at least one issue that seems still harder, more painful, and seemingly more intractable. That is the abortion issue. In this **Going Farther** section, we will explore the abortion issue at more length, using the methods outlined in chapter 13, especially those for reframing problems. If those methods can help us make progress *even on the abortion issue*, then surely they should be promising and powerful everywhere else too!

CONGRUENT VALUES?

We might begin by recalling the theme of chapter 12: that beneath even painful and seemingly extreme conflicts, values may be much more congruent than it seems. In the abortion debate, unacknowledged but powerful and even obvious congruences crowd in as soon as we begin to look for them.

In truth, every one of us is pro-life. Life is what makes love, and community, and beauty, and everything else possible. Those acts associated with creating and preserving and honoring life—sex, childbirth, nurturing a baby, caring for the sick, mourning the dead—are among the deepest and most profound of life's experiences.

Every one of us is *also* pro-choice. Freedom, self-determination, the right to control what happens in and to our own bodies—these are basic values too. In politics, in the stores, in “lifestyle”—choice is everything. Some people even think that seat belts and speed limits are unjustified limits on physical freedom, but these are trivial restrictions compared to pregnancy and childbirth.

The most common view I find among my students is that “I probably wouldn't choose abortion myself, but I think the choice should be there for others.” This would probably be classified as a “pro-choice” view, as the usual categories go—but those categories may hide more than they reveal. There's middle ground here—*between* the usual views. *Both* sides acknowledge that abortion can be a painful and tragic, but also (sometimes) necessary, choice.

In fact, then, despite the painful and persistent debate between two single-minded sides, most people recognize that abortion choices pit two genuine values against each other in a case where both of them count. Both of them are right in their way. How to put them together is still a (hard) question, but at least we can find here a shared starting point. It might help to remember that there already is a large network of people devoted to working from common ground, or at least compatible values, in this very debate: the

Common Ground Network for Life and Choice—again, Life *and* Choice—devoted to dialogue and working from a common agenda. You’ve seen some of their materials in chapter 11. They were not much in the news, but they worked away for ten years, and their umbrella organization—Search for Common Ground—has expanded to other conflicts too.

THINK PREVENTION

No one thinks that abortion, by itself, is a good thing. This is why the term “pro-abortion” is unfair: the pro-choice view is really only that abortion is sometimes the least bad option. The natural next questions are how we can prevent situations with such bad options from even arising. As Julie Polter writes in *Sojourners*, a social justice-oriented Christian journal, “If pro-life people know that one abortion is too many and many pro-choice people can at least agree that there surely shouldn’t be as many abortions as there are, shouldn’t we do what we can in the scope of that common territory?”

We could start by asking how to reduce the demand for abortions themselves. Is there any realistic way to reduce the number of unwanted pregnancies and to keep those unintended pregnancies that do occur from being unwanted?

More than half of all women who seek abortion were not using contraception when they got pregnant. Why? We need to find out. Lack of access? Lack of education? Violence? These things can be changed. Changing them might not even be controversial.

And what about the other half, women who used contraception and still got pregnant? Again we need to find out why. Poor or difficult-to-use methods? Resistance from spouses and lovers? These things too can be changed. With a fraction of the energy and intensity put into the present abortion debate, they *could* be changed.

When the welfare laws were up for revision in 1996, some conservatives proposed to deny assistance to children born of mothers under 18, or currently on welfare, or whose paternity hadn’t been established. Many of these limits are now law. But a remarkable thing happened along the way. Nearly all major organizations on *both sides* of the abortion issue campaigned against the bill—including the National Right to Life Committee, Planned Parenthood, the U.S. Catholic Conference, and the National Organization for Women (NOW). Both sides feared that the results would be to coerce abortions among poor women. Both sides made the connections back to economic conditions. Pro-choice and pro-life organizations even *jointly designed* a comprehensive child-support reform plan. Common ground emerged in the face of a common threat. But why wait for that?

SURPRISES

Of course there will still, sometimes, be unintended pregnancies. What about when prevention fails? Why does abortion sometimes become so desperate a need? Why does a child, or another child, or a child at the “wrong” time sometimes promise only disaster for a mother or family?

Some on the pro-life side answer: the real problem is that we think we can have everything. We want to control every aspect of our lives. Maybe we ought to be more humble in the face of life’s mysteries. When we speak of “unintended” pregnancy, for example, we set it up from the start as a failure of control and therefore a problem, a potential disaster. Some people propose to speak of “surprise” pregnancy instead. A “surprise” is not necessarily a disaster—it can also be a kind of gift, an opportunity.

But *still*, “surprises” can be unpleasant. More must be said. Why is the surprise sometimes unwelcome? A strategic question might be, How can we make these particular surprises more welcome, more bearable?

Part of the problem is that women still confront inflexible expectations about career tracks, work schedules, and schooling, coupled with lower pay in general, poor-quality or super-expensive child care, distant extended families (not much help), and all the rest. Though a few in the pro-life movement may believe that women should not aspire to careers, most pro-lifers agree with nearly everyone else that careers ought at least to be one option for women. Women have a right to seek that kind of life—and to have a sex life too. But then the trap closes: How to have a baby when it would mean two or three years out of school or part-time at work, long-term financial costs, and permanent emotional commitments elsewhere?

This is a fixable problem. We need more flexible expectations and alternative work and schooling patterns that do not punish or impede women (and men) who also choose major family responsibilities. Most European countries are far ahead of the United States in this area. It's not so hard to work out the details.

Equal pay for women is, or ought to be, one goal. Shared child-raising has everything to recommend it. At the very least, fathers should be expected to support their children financially (at present, even with greatly expanded enforcement, only a third of divorced fathers contribute anything at all). Paid parental leaves are the norm in Europe. My students, working on this problem in a creative mode, have suggested still other ideas, such as a system of "adoptive grandparents." What do you think?

The same goes for schools. One of my ethics classes was discussing the abortion issue with our college chaplain. He remarked that in his decade or so at the college he had seen only three or four students carry pregnancies to term and stay in school too. A (male) student then said

I'm pro-life, but I can't blame a fellow student for getting an abortion when the choice is between the abortion and finishing college. Your whole future is at stake. I think the real question is: why should she be put in that position?

Why indeed. So the question to us is, what can *we* change—teachers, students, chaplains—so that fewer women are put in this position in the future? Class schedules, assignments, how financial aid is calculated? How hard would that be?

And adoption? Far more could be done to make it more workable, from settling the vexed question of adoptees' access to biological-parent records to genuinely supporting women who choose to go through pregnancy and then choose adoption: that is, supporting them economically, emotionally, and especially socially. Deep-seated sexual norms and expectations have regularly been stood on their heads in the last half-century: the "shame" of bearing and "giving up" an unintended child would hardly be the biggest. How much would it really take?

ACKNOWLEDGMENT AND RECONCILIATION

Sometimes, though—still—there will be losses, indeed tragic losses, no matter what is chosen or how you look at it. Different lives and life choices are at stake, all of them precious, and they cannot all be lived out. Most people accept abortion in cases of rape or when the mother's own life is at stake, though the fetus and potential baby is no less innocent for all that.

The most obvious loss, of course, is the physical life of the fetus, the child-to-be. The loss of a pregnancy to miscarriage is acknowledged all around as a serious loss. Why not the same in abortion? The usual response is that sometimes the other stakes—the life prospects of the pregnant woman or also those around her—are also great, though less visible. Often, surely, this is true. In practice, though, we have trouble holding both kinds

of stakes, or potential losses, in mind at the same time. Tragic choices trouble us—we do like to see the world in blacks and whites—and so there is a tendency (on *both* sides) to discount or even deny the losses on the “other” side.

But why? Mightn't this kind of denial even be part of the problem? Trying another tack, suppose that we consider how to make the loss of the fetus—the loss of a potential life—both more visible and at the same time possibly more bearable.

Japanese Buddhists have developed a kind of memorial ritual, even sometimes a kind of apology, for aborted as well as miscarried fetuses (also, strikingly, for animals deliberately killed in the course of drug experiments). *Mizuko Kuyo*, it is called. It is a way of facing rather than denying the consequences—underscoring the seriousness of the choice, which is surely good from the point of view of all sides—but also reaching some kind of closure, making it possible to go on. Loss can be acknowledged without shutting down the hard choices required. Those facing such a choice can have a better way to get a grip on just what is at stake. Those who have made such choices can have a better way to make peace with them.

What could similar rituals look like with us? Wouldn't it be a worthwhile project to develop our own forms of remembrance and reconciliation, while also acknowledging that sometimes, at least, the choice must remain with the pregnant woman and those close to her? A delicate task, yes, especially in the present atmosphere of intense moralism and blame, private tragedies made public, and wounds again and again rubbed raw. But there is also a glimmer of an unexpected possibility of healing here—another place for reframing and reconstruction.

NOTES

Useful data on abortion attitudes can be found in “Most Americans Back Legal Abortion Under Certain Circumstances,” *Angus-Reid Public Opinion Reports*, June 26, 2012: see www.angus-reid.org/most-americans-back-legal-abortion-under-certain-circumstances/. Julie Polter is quoted from her article “Women and Children First: Developing a Common Agenda to Make Abortion Rare,” *Sojourners*, May–June 1995. On *Mizuko Kuyo*, see William R. LaFleur's remarkable book *Liquid Life: Abortion and Buddhism in Japan* (Princeton University Press, 1992) and the “Ethics Updates” website at <http://ethics.sandiego.edu/Applied/Abortion/index.asp.14>.



GOING FARTHER #15

WHERE ETHICS MEETS POLITICS

In the 1970s and 1980s, *bioethics* became a major focus of ethical philosophers. Bioethics is a field of “applied ethics” that addresses ethical issues that arise specifically within the practice of medicine, health care, and the biological sciences. Most hospitals now have Ethics Committees and for a time some even had ethicists with beepers on call. Training in ethics is expected of most doctors and other medical decision makers. Politically, one of the biggest debates of recent years has been over the health care system and some of the moral values that bear on it, such as social justice and personal autonomy, as well as health itself.

This **Going Farther** exercise aims to bring into focus the political decisions and practices that shape many ethical issues, using bioethical issues as cases in point. I don’t just mean the obvious politics of the debate over health care reform. There are also many other and often unnoticed “background” political decisions and practices that frame ethical problems that come up more visibly and familiarly. We make choices, as a political community, about how much and how far the government regulates, or doesn’t regulate, medical care. We decide, through our representatives, how much tax money we as a community will spend to provide (some kinds of) medical care to (some) people—or to research cures, or to support preventive programs, or to train doctors. Or not. We also decide, by setting up and sustaining a legal system that applies to the practice of medicine, among other things, what kinds of legal rights patients (and families, doctors, pharmacists, insurance companies, etc.) are granted.

All of these choices, and many more, shape the practice of medicine. They therefore give rise to various kinds of ethical issues that might not arise, or would arise differently, if we made different political choices. Of course, to decide some of these issues we’d probably need a whole political philosophy. I do not mean that you must do so for this exercise! The key point here is just to recognize that there are such political choices in the background of the bioethical problems that we face. This in turn gives us, at the very least, more creative room to move.

We reframe ethical issues, remember, when we look behind and around such problems to see if there are ways to rearrange their causes so that they come up in different and more manageable forms, or maybe (ideally) don’t come up at all. It is a way of recognizing that we have more options than just tackling the immediate problem head-on. Indeed, you could argue that sometimes the only decent options are political!

THE HEINZ DILEMMA ONE MORE TIME

Remember once again our discussion of the Heinz dilemma in chapter 13. It seemed at first that this problem requires a yes-or-no, one-or-the-other sort of answer that applies only to Heinz and people in similarly desperate straits. Once we re-viewed that dilemma with a wider lens, however, we began to see that it is “framed” by a number of

institutional and community arrangements and expectations that could themselves be different. Even though the Heinz dilemma as it stands is useful as a way of highlighting the differences between utilitarian and rights-based ethical theories, I have suggested that it is also misleading as an example of a real ethical problem, especially if we insist in leaving it just as it stands. Remember: the whole point of reframing is to *change* the problem!

Consequently, for this **Going Farther** exercise, begin by spelling out some of the background social and political choices that you think are involved in certain standard bioethical problems. You could do this in quite a basic and even bold way. For example, in the Heinz case, one thing we can say right away is that such a dilemma can arise in the first place only in a system in which health care is a commodity—that is, something to be purchased—rather than a right, and in which individuals may or may not be able to make the purchase (or buy insurance to help cover the costs). You could therefore predict that the ability or inability to pay will be a major ethical issue, in a way that it would not be an issue in a system in which medical care, or at least basic life-saving drugs, were provided to people as a matter of right.

Of course, it is possible that a commodity system for medicine (like life-saving drugs) is, after all, the best practical system, or that such a system is mandated by the proper understanding of freedom and property rights (such as doctors' and pharmacists' and inventors' rights and freedoms). This is certainly an arguable moral and political position. But it is not the only possible position—and one of the arguments against it is precisely that it can end up putting many people into situations like Heinz's, which also seems unjust and morally disturbing. It is at least a question.

Moreover, even if we aren't going to settle the answer anytime soon, the question at least opens up some new kinds of responses to dilemmas like Heinz's. For example, one might be publicly funded medical insurance for extreme cases—not necessarily a full system of medical care as a right, but some of kind of supplemental aid to people in truly desperate straits. After all, it might be argued, we already have a system in which access to life-saving drugs (and other kinds of care) is taken to be a right for some groups. Senior citizens get Medicare, for example. Veterans get free medical care at VA hospitals for service-related medical problems. These are choices we have made as a political community. Veterans have put their lives on the line for us, for our country: it seems the most elementary principle of justice, and the least we can do, to provide for the treatment of the injuries they sustained in the line of service. This is a widely accepted principle across the entire political spectrum.

As noted in the sample dialogue in the section on brainstorming in chapter 13, we've even made the choice as a political community that inmates in prisons should get free medical care, presumably because otherwise imprisonment might unjustly become a death sentence. We've taken on the responsibility of caring for them by depriving them of the freedom to do it themselves. This too seems a pretty elemental requirement of justice.

In short, there seems to be some room to reconsider things here. Social backup in desperate or deserving cases is not unheard of. In many developed countries, in fact, it is the norm across the board. It is at least an option—at least a starting point for some creative rethinking.

The Heinz dilemma and others are sometimes classified as “lifeboat cases,” meaning a kind of case that presents very stark choices, usually life and death, and in which it is not clear that there are any good choices at all. The model is an overloaded lifeboat in the open ocean, close to sinking unless some of its occupants go overboard—voluntarily or not. What to do? How to decide? It does seem like some people have to go. Some philosophers specialize in such cases—at least, again, for teaching purposes: they are supposed

to make certain principles very salient. Others argue that at such extremes, ethics simply cannot apply.

It's perhaps more important to note, though, that actual lifeboat cases are themselves products of certain specific social and political choices: how to regulate passenger ships, for one thing. One reason that more than 1,500 people died when the *Titanic* hit an iceberg and sank in 1912 was that the ship had far fewer spaces on its lifeboats than it had passengers. It complied with the law at the time—but the law was, it turned out, far too lax (partly at the behest of the passenger lines themselves). This was changed after the disaster: laws were passed to require enough lifeboats for everyone on board such ships.

Again: a political choice. The aim was not to “solve” lifeboat cases: of course such laws won't help if somehow you are already stuck in a sinking ship without enough lifeboats. The aim was to try to prevent such cases from even coming up. That's the point of reframing! We are not obliged just to accept such choices as some puzzle-poser, or even life itself, puts them to us. We can revisit outlying aspects of the problem, think prevention—and give ourselves more room to move in our ethical problem-solving. How many other lifeboat cases might be best approached in this way?

YOUR BASIC BIOETHICAL PROBLEM CASE

Here is a schematic example of a common type of bioethical problem.

A is the victim of a traffic accident, now lying unconscious in the ICU and wholly dependent on life support. Short-term survival is likely with help, but brain damage is probable and even the return of consciousness is uncertain. A's family is traumatized but may be willing to accept her death. What should be done?

We may ask what A's doctors, or A's family, or A herself if she could participate, should decide to do. We may ask what Kant or Guisán or Noddings would advise, what the Ethics of the Person or of Virtue suggest or allow or require, and so on. Notice, though, that once again there is a range of “framing” questions that are harder to see, but also are crucial.

Why did this accident happen, for instance? Why is there often more money for intensive care units in hospitals than for erecting stoplights and fixing potholes so that people like A are less likely to make the acquaintance of the ICU in the first place? Why are cars so unsafe that people are so often badly injured in accidents? And why do people sometimes drive so unsafely—and fail to use seat belts that might readily prevent such injuries?

These questions again open up larger and unexpected possibilities. They are not going to help A very much—but they may represent a much more powerful ethical response to A's type of situation. Suppose, for instance, that A is the tenth accident victim seen this week. One good question surely is: Is there some special cause for so many accidents?

Such questions are seldom raised within the hospital itself. It is not the hospitals' business, we may say—it is hard enough just to care for the victims. Reframing the problem, though, surely we could argue that it is hospitals' responsibility to pay attention to such patterns. One reason is that hospitals are in an especially good position—indeed, a unique position—to collect the relevant data. Hospitals already follow local trends in mortality and morbidity: it should not be too hard to get a little more specific.

These questions have political consequences in turn. Maybe what the city really needs is a concerted effort to up seat-belt use. Or maybe traffic flows should be redesigned at some especially treacherous intersections. If we wanted to address these issues, or the ever-present pothole question, we'd have to do it through City Council or the Highway Department—agencies of the same governments that also help fund the hospitals. Maybe funds need to be reallocated.

Unavoidably these are political questions and are likely to be controversial. There are major constituencies for all sides—victims’ support groups, traffic engineers, public health officials. Still, in the hospital case, to put more money into emergency room staff when a few more traffic lights would, say, halve the accident rate is not only cost-ineffective but also, arguably, ethically problematic. At least the issue should be raised.

RESPECT FOR PERSONS

Conservative critics point out that in a system in which major medical decisions are made, in effect, by bureaucrats and lawyers, patients and their families are disempowered: they can’t make such choices for themselves. This is one classical argument for a market for medical services and goods. People can choose their own priorities and act on them so far as they have the means.

Notice that this argument is not somehow for better bureaucratic processes, as if a better committee process or different criteria for rationing health care (should choices sometimes come to that) would be the right kind of solution. Maybe such changes would produce better results in particular cases, yes, but the larger point is that a system in which such choices are made by government policy or hospital committees staffed by lawyers and administrators—even when the choices are usually good ones—still infringes on the rights of the person, of individual patients, to make such major choices for themselves. Conservatives critique and resist a *system* in which bioethical questions are framed for others, besides the patient, to decide in the first place. It’s not up to us—it should be up to *them*.

A more libertarian side of this argument might go on to reframe the question of assisted suicide, for example, as a question of how patients got into a situation where they have to depend on someone else’s approval to end their own lives. Suicide is a right, on a libertarian view—perhaps even one of our most fundamental of rights, the right to conduct our lives in general as we choose, so long as it does not impinge others’ rights to do the same. Presumably, then, one also has the right to contract with others to make that right real if one cannot end one’s life by oneself. We need to rearrange our legal system accordingly.

You may or may not agree with this kind of critique, but the philosophical point it makes is, once again, a deep and valid one. Again, the very ways in which we decide, as a community, to set up our medical system profoundly shape the kinds of ethical issues that will come up within it. It can even create whole new categories of ethical issues that didn’t exist before—and that we might well be better off without. Since it is a political choice to create a system that ends up framing bioethical questions in this way, it may also be that our best response is not to answer them as they stand but to *change the system*. Once again, we may not need to simply solve “the” problem as presented. “The” problem as presented may itself be the problem!

On the other hand, it’s a serious moral criticism of a pay-for-service medical system that it only works for the fairly small number of people who can pay their medical expenses out of pocket or afford their choice of insurance plans. Most people, even those with reasonably good insurance, still have to cede a major decision-making role to insurance companies and their committees of accountants and lawyers to make major medical decisions. For most of us, in other words, a “free market” in medicine does not really empower us to make our own choices instead of “bureaucrats,” but instead empowers a different set of bureaucrats, and probably a less visible and accountable set of decision makers at that. At least with government policies we all have a voice in affecting or changing them—not

so for insurance companies. In a market system health care is still “rationed,” one might argue, just not by the government.

These are not easy questions, obviously, but they are after all what come up. It is no good not facing them!

YOUR CHALLENGE

Now you should be ready to take up the challenge of this exercise. You may be working alone, or with other students. Either way, follow these steps.

1. *Choose or find some cases* in bioethics that interest you. Maybe you are a student in a bioethics or ethics class already looking at such cases, in which case your instructor or textbook will probably give you such cases. If not, or for additional resources, try some of these links (or do your own Web search with keywords such as “medical ethics cases”):

www.mhhe.com/biosci/genbio/olc_linkedcontent/bioethics_cases/

<https://www.scu.edu/ethics/focus-areas/bioethics/resources/cases/> <http://www.scu.edu/ethics/publications/submitted/cirone/medical-ethics.html>

www.ascensionhealth.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=49&Itemid=173

<https://www.practicalbioethics.org/resources/case-studies>

Again, these are only a few of many options. You might also want to survey your classmates and acquaintances for other and probably more personal examples. Many medical ethics textbooks also include lists of cases for reflection and discussion.

2. *Begin your analysis by identifying the problem and the core values involved.* Here you can frame the alternatives in the usual way—staying within the usual range of options (like: What should Heinz do? or, Should the plug be pulled on A?). Later you can come back and add to your answers here as you begin to see more aspects of the problem and values involved.
3. *Now try to identify some of the “framing” choices* that have led to this problem coming up in this way in the first place (like the fact that life-saving drugs are often treated as market commodities in our system, or the likelihood that A’s accident had correctable causes). Use the discussion in the first part of this **Going Farther** section as a first model.
4. Finally, *highlight some of the ways that your answers to #3 may open up some new kinds of room to move*, some new creative options (like alternative systems for providing life-saving drugs, or building a campaign to increase seat-belt usage as a way of making A’s life and possible death a positive legacy). Try for practically achievable options, at least for a start. As you present and discuss them, try to keep the core shared values in full view so as to keep the discussion inclusive and constructive.

VARIATIONS

Here are a few further or different directions you might take with this exercise.

- You could, after all, directly tackle the more sweeping question of the organization of medicine and health systems as a whole. Should we perhaps reform the whole medical system, for example on the model of the VA or other countries’ “single-payer” medical systems?

(And please do not think that the overheated public debate of the last decade, or anything at all that you may have heard on television, is necessarily any reliable indication of how such systems actually function or their track records. This will take some careful research!)

Conversely, is the solution perhaps something much more libertarian? Or, yet again, are there other options still: for example, a publicly funded but much more local system of primary care, neighborhood and workplace clinics with health care providers who do not necessarily have to go to school for ten years just to provide first aid and public health training? (Remember: there are usually many more than just two options.)

- Many of the arguments in the recent and current health care debate are explicitly ethical arguments. Look at some of the speeches by supporters and opponents of various systematic alternatives—the thoughtful ones, anyway—as well as the more ethical and carefully considered ethical and philosophical statements on both (all) sides of the issue. Understand the ethics!
- RU-486 (Mifepristone) is a drug developed in the 1980s as an abortifacient (a drug that causes abortion) in early pregnancy and also as an emergency contraceptive. It was also, as you might expect, very controversial. The French drugmaker, Roussel-Uclaf, came under immense pressure from anti-abortion activists and in late 1988 decided to withdraw the drug from the market. The French Health Minister at the time, Claude Evin, responded by ordering Roussel-Uclaf to distribute Mifepristone in the interests of public health and explained his order in these words: “I could not permit the abortion debate to deprive women of a product that represents medical progress. *From the moment Government approval for the drug was granted, RU-486 became the moral property of women, not just the property of a drug company.*” [Emphasis mine. See Ulmann, Andre (2000). “The development of Mifepristone: A pharmaceutical drama in three acts.” *Journal of the American Medical Women’s Association* 55 (3 Suppl): 117–120, online at <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/10846319>, accessed 9/10/11.]

The subsequent history of Mifepristone is fascinating and complex (currently it is available in most countries, but under heavy medical control—another political choice). The question I would propose to you here, however, has to do with the French Health Minister’s argument. In his view, there are conditions under which a drug (and in this case, notice, not exactly a life-saving one) becomes the “moral property” of potential users, not of the company that produces it. Can you elaborate on the ethical values that underlie this kind of claim? (That is, what is the best case you can make for it?) Also, what kind of ethics might draw the opposite conclusion? (That is, what is the best case you can make against it?) Again, try to answer carefully and thoughtfully, and in a way that furthers constructive discourse rather than inflames passions.

- Can you see the same potential for reframing other (that is, non-medical) kinds of ethical issues along similar lines? After all, political choices frame many aspects of our collective life besides medical ones. Consider business ethics, or environmental ethics, or any other ethical domain of your choice. Are there analogous ways to reframe other issues and cases—and open up new possibilities as well?



Moral Vision

Our final topic is moral vision—ethics’ most ambitious and expansive offering. It is no surprise, then, that it also takes special work and skill.

WHAT IS MORAL VISION?

Four features define Moral Vision as we will understand it here.

First, moral vision is primarily affirmative rather than negative. It is visibly and energetically *for* something, rather than primarily against something.

Second, moral vision is idealistic. Its hopes are not modest. It dares to imagine the full realization of certain moral values—and to use that imagination as a way to think about what we most deeply value in the end.

Consequently, moral visions must also be *whole* visions. Moral visions imagine systematic, large-scale change affecting many aspects of the world: new worlds, in short, rather than just small readjustments of the world we know.

Finally, moral visions are inviting to all. They can and must aim to bring values into congruence in a major way: to be widely appealing rather than narrow, oppositional, and partisan.

MORAL VISION IS AFFIRMATIVE

Have you noticed that everyday moral thinking is often highly reactive? Offenses to morality intrude on us, maybe harm us or offend virtue or justice for ourselves or others we care about, or society as a whole. We are outraged, we protest and complain—as well we should.

Of course we are entitled, even sometimes obliged to speak up in this way. It makes sense to react to moral crises or perceived moral failures by making moral arguments and efforts to limit the damage, or at least to identify and condemn it. Do only this, though, and ethics itself starts feeling like it is essentially a negative and critical activity. We may become “moralistic” in the unfortunate popular sense of carping, self-righteous, judgmental. Always fault-finding. This is so widespread a stereotype today that when I survey my

students at the end of my ethics class about their expectations before they took the class, many say that they mostly expected a lot of negativity against sex, drugs, academic dishonesty, and the like. Many say they were relieved when the class didn't "just preach at us."

Yet negativity is not the only possible response, and should not be our only one. Morality also—and essentially—has a positive or affirmative aspect. Even when we are mainly reacting to some perceived moral offense, there is almost always a positive moral idea beneath it. What otherwise does the offense offend? When we reject or condemn acts of cruelty, we invoke a vision not just of the absence of cruelty but of a *positive good*, of its opposite: of kindness and benevolence—an idea(l) of how people should act instead. When we find fault with someone's moral heedlessness—driving carelessly, for example—or with whole societies acting without regard for the world we will be passing on to the next generations, we are also invoking a positive alternative: the way we hope people would drive, or heed the future, instead.

These underlying ideas—of how we should act instead, of how things should be—already give us a glimpse, at least, of a positive moral vision. The task of moral vision as a way of thinking is to bring them out, to put them into the spotlight. The seventh-generation idea, for example, is a moral vision. Indeed, so is our very definition of ethics, in general, itself: of taking care for the basic needs and legitimate expectations of others as well as ourselves. We *should* take care for others, on the road or into the future, who are affected by our actions. These are positive goals!

In short, then, ethics in a visionary's practice is more than a collection of criticisms and reactions. It is much more than—indeed, fundamentally different from—carping or moralizing. The task is to "accentuate the positive," in the phrase of the old popular song. Moral vision is essentially *for* something, rather than most notably against something.

MORAL VISION IS IDEALISTIC

Accentuating the positive is the beginning, but there is more than that too. Moral vision goes farther: it is truly idealistic. This is its second main feature.

A moral vision is, naturally, *visionary*. It is concerned with bigger pictures and longer-term possibilities. Moral vision asks more of us than just meeting moral standards. Vision asks us to bring those standards up along with us. In the end, then, it is more than just looking for the other side of the usual negative coin, or stating the underlying ideas more positively. It asks us to aim much higher: to put the positive ideas before ourselves as animating ideals. Its hopes are not modest: it dares to imagine the full realization of certain moral values.

Little-known fact: when Martin Luther King walked up to the microphone at the Lincoln Memorial at the famous civil rights march in August of 1963, he only had a short speech prepared. It was not the part of the speech that is

so famous today. All that fit within his assigned time was a somewhat formal recitation of Negro injustice and suffering and an exhortation to carry on the struggle for equal rights with “dignity and discipline.” It was a well-done speech, but it was the same sort of thing that many other speakers had already done as well and already.

King finished the prepared speech and his allotted time. He was about to sit down. But the story goes that the gospel singer Mahalia Jackson called out, “Tell them about your dream, Martin! Tell them about the dream!” Other listeners shouted encouragement too. And so King launched into an impassioned improvisation that made a decent speech into one of the most moving and powerful speeches of the 20th century.

The reaction to King’s speech afterward—continuing to this day—shows that Jackson was not alone in wanting more. What she asked for was an idealistic moral vision: a vision framed not simply as a set of complaints but in terms of ideals and hopes. An explicit and open invitation to a wary nation to join in the spirit that the march had already embodied. And that is what King then—on the spot—offered, culminating in the famous lines:

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream that one day, down in Alabama . . . little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers. I have a dream today.

Now that King’s speech is so iconic, we have gotten too used to it, perhaps, and his imagery of a “dream” has gotten rather, well, dreamy, and people invoke it for any kind of unrealistic fantasy. But King’s dream is much more focused and explicit. In fact it is only a vivid description of what ethics itself asks of us. Community with all others without prejudice. Children—and everyone else too—judged by who they are and not by external characteristics. He has no illusions that these ideals will be easy to achieve: moral vision does not somehow lose touch with reality. But they *are* our ideals—they are what we ultimately aim and hope for—and King’s genius was to state them compellingly as such.

Indeed, they compel us in part *because* they make such a long reach. “The arc of the moral universe is long,” as King also famously said, “but it bends toward justice.” Or rather, we come to see that it is our job to bend it so.

Ethical philosophers can be idealists too. They may be less eloquent than King, perhaps, but also more systematic and analytical. In King’s stirring

words there are distant echoes of the second form of Kant's Categorical Imperative, for instance, to treat each other always as ends and never merely just as means. Such philosophically stated ideals sometimes have their historical moments and contexts in which they too stir people's hearts. Kant's ethical and political philosophy developed in response to the unfolding revolution in France, when at least for a moment it really seemed as if a society of genuine "Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity"—a genuine "Kingdom of Ends"—might actually be realized in Europe.

Similarly, when the founders of utilitarianism insisted on egalitarianism, their immediate practical agenda was to oppose the Corn Laws and other legislation thoughtlessly (or deliberately) oppressing England's poor. Jeremy Bentham and both elder and younger Mill were politically active reformers, and their doctrine that *everyone's* suffering and potential happiness should count in political decisions was radically—and intentionally—idealistic for its time.

Esperanza Guisán's appeal to utilitarianism as an "ethic of liberty and solidarity" (Reading 15) reminds us that utilitarianism still can be radically idealistic, even today. Likewise, surely, are Aldo Leopold's appeal to the "integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community" (Reading 20), Margaret Urban Walker's vision of a practice of attentive openness to others (Reading 2), and the Iroquois appeal to the good of the seventh generation. These are all "long reaches," painting bigger pictures and offering longer-term ethical possibilities. Moral visions all!

MORAL VISIONS ARE WHOLE VISIONS

There is more again. To be realistic—to genuinely make sense—the "long reach" moral ideal must be envisioned in a complex world with multiple other values also in play. It is not enough to imagine improving one feature of the world, even radically, or making a different specific moral choice, as if that feature or choice were independent of everything else. Our visions of better moral choices need to be imagined holistically: they must speak to multiple values and to our practical situation in general.

Put another way: the task is to connect one set of moral values and moral actions with a larger encompassing set of values and actions so that the *whole* is compelling and grand. We must be able to envision actual ways to realize the ideal, or anyway move significantly toward it, in our own lives and society. And our ideals in turn become stronger by being linked to other values and families of values.

Suppose you are very concerned for animal rights. It is certainly important to establish the facts, as best we can, about how much animals feel and understand and how our basic families of value might be extended to at least some of them. You may find the moral arguments, considering the issue by itself, totally compelling. Indeed, they can be formulated specifically as

ideals. Bentham, ever the visionary, stated the “dream” succinctly in some powerful lines:

The day may come, when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withheld from them but by the hand of tyranny. . . . Why should the law refuse its protection to any sensitive being? . . . The time will come when humanity will extend its mantle over everything which breathes. . . .

Yet there is also more to be done. A moral vision requires, as well, a larger picture of how things would be if it were realized. If the law were to “extend its mantle” to other animals, how would everything else change? How would legal and moral protections work for such different kinds of beings? And for Heaven’s sake, what will we *eat*?—or so many people will ask. These questions are not necessarily objections—not at first anyway, unless they go unanswered—but they *are* concerns, issues, needs that have to be addressed before the vision will be compelling, or even clear. They call for more work on the visionaries’ part.

What *will* we eat, for example? Sometimes people seem to imagine vegetarian diets as simply a familiar “meat-and-potatoes” kind of diet without the meat, which certainly would be neither tasty nor nutritious. Vegetarians may try to explain in response that non-meat diets can be as inventive, varied, and appealing as meat diets. Just look at all the cookbooks! Meanwhile, a very large percentage of the grain protein that pigs and beef cattle are fed is just excreted out the other end—polluting the estuaries and groundwater for its final act—or, to put it the other way around, we could get twenty times the protein by just eating the grain ourselves, with cleaner water and more available land and power to boot. We begin to imagine a different kind of agriculture and food production.

Health could be mentioned too. Both heart disease and cancer, the biggest killers in industrialized countries, are directly linked to meat diets. Vegans, eating neither meat or dairy, have the highest life expectancy of any demographic category in America. Thus, we also begin to imagine a different kind of “normal” diet.

This emerging case can be contested, of course—more argument is necessary—but the point is just that this is what moral vision needs to do: paint non-meat diets into a larger picture of a meat-free world that integrates other values and concerns as well. The argument can and should at the same time maintain its idealistic and even imaginative edge. For example, eating mainly grains may somehow not sound quite as good as eating “higher” up the food chain—not up to our regal species station, as it were. But instead of “lower,” vegetarians might suggest we say “closer to the source.” Plants produce protein, sugars, and other organic compounds directly from sunlight by photosynthesis. We animals can’t photosynthesize ourselves directly, but

we can do the next best thing and eat those organisms that do. So there is an ideal for us: *Eat Sun!*

We can also consider what new kinds of relationships with other animals may be established or developed. The ideal is not simply withdrawing from animal worlds, either, is it? Old ways of living side by side or in “mixed communities” with other animals might be reaffirmed or deepened, while genuinely new possibilities open up too. There are musicians, for instance, who make music with whales—jamming with wild orcas, where musical lines are passed back and forth between human and other-than-human participants. How could such practices be more widely recognized, celebrated, expanded?

You see the task, then, and the possibilities as well: again, to paint a compelling and inviting picture of a different whole *world*. Vision-driven moral change is not going to be a matter of changing one specific practice while everything else is held constant, unchanging or changing in uncoordinated or unrelated ways. No: the affirmative and idealistic picture is also a big and coordinated one. We must follow up “dreaming” with a program of change across the board, worked out in varied and mutually-supporting ways. Effective dreaming takes work!

MORAL VISIONS ARE INVITING TO ALL

Finally, moral visions can and must be shareable: widely appealing, rather than narrow, oppositional, or partisan. In the terms of chapter 12, they must endeavor to bring values into congruence.

It might help to distinguish *victories* from *visions*. A victory is a short- or near-term success, elevating some singular and specific moral project, like making abortion illegal, enacting a carbon tax, or legalizing medical marijuana. These may be good things, or not; you may agree or not; but regardless, these are partisan and contentious matters as things stand now. Victory would mean the ascendancy of one side. But such ascendancies are also likely to be temporary: they don’t resolve the contention, really, or move beyond it, but only suppress or disempower one side or the other. Often a reaction is provoked precisely by such a victory, so that soon enough the other side comes to power. Then law or social mores may easily swing back around the other way—or farther. Chapter 12 noted that just this happened with Prohibition.

Vision, again, seeks more: something longer-term, more settled, genuine and lasting moral progress. It needs to try, at least, to bring everyone along. Visions therefore must look past partisan victories to longer-term and broader goals that are also widely shared, or can be made more shareable, and therefore more steady and stable when achieved.

By way of example we may return again to the civil rights movement. On one level, its goals—voting rights, school desegregation—seemed partisan,

at least at the time. There was contention—however unjustified. But King and the movement's other leaders very deliberately did not fight back on the same level. They reached much higher, but not for something that divided Americans or asked white people to reverse long-held basic values—moral values, anyway. On the contrary, they challenged white America to *recognize* those values, and their true implications.

King's appeals were always to the most fundamental American values, and beyond them to biblical values and precepts that were recognizable and compelling to most of his hearers. Back in Washington on that hot and nervous August day in 1963, literally in the very shadow of Lincoln, he spoke of the Emancipation Proclamation and other "promissory notes" that the nation had not yet paid.

In a sense we have come to our nation's capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. This note was a promise that all men, yes, black men as well as white men, would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

. . . Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, America has given the Negro people a bad check, a check which has come back marked "insufficient funds." But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. . . . We have . . . come to this hallowed spot to remind America of the fierce urgency of now. . . . Now is the time to make real the promises of democracy. Now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial justice. . . . Now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

King's whole strategy was to call Americans to recognize its own deepest ideals in the civil rights struggle. Yet he fully expects that it will be paid, and freely and gladly too, once Americans recognize the moral need. The dream of racial equality itself, King says,

is deeply rooted in the American dream. I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal."

King knew that for Americans there is hardly a more deeply shared moral vision than those words of Jefferson's. And at the same time that we still have a long way to go.

And again:

One day the South will know that when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters, they were in reality standing up for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred values in our Judeo-Christian heritage, thereby bringing our nation back to those great wells of

democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in their formulation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

As you know, on thorny moral issues where a case can usually be made that “both sides are right,” bringing values into congruence may require reframing an issue (chapter 13) and looking beneath the contending sides for shared interests (chapter 12) rather than staying on the level of “positions.” A shareable moral vision in regard to the abortion question, for example, could focus on ideals like “Every child a wanted child”—reducing or eliminating the unnecessary burdens and disadvantages of unexpected pregnancies and unplanned children in our society, for example. It reframes the question in such a way that most people on both (all) sides of the abortion debate no longer find themselves so desperately contending, but on the same side; and we would find, when we look up from *that* work well-accomplished, that what remains of “the” abortion question as we now confront it is much less widespread or painful or intractable.

In short: victories are win-lose situations, but visions aim to be win-win.

THE USES OF MORAL VISION

Let us now look more deeply at the uses and values of moral visions.

TO INSPIRE

Moral values sometimes operate by pushing us, somewhat unwillingly or at least unexpectedly, toward some sort of moral minimum, morally getting by. But pushes are generally not so welcome or so motivating. No one likes to be nagged or constantly reminded of their failings—though of course sometimes it may be necessary. By contrast, think of the power of moral visions as a *pull* rather than a push. “Pull” is toward something that captivates us, rouses the heart and the mind. Unlike moralizing and carping, and unlike extensive moral arguments that aim for victory, moral vision works by putting something uplifting in front of us. We move not wearily or out of accommodation but out of attraction. Moral vision thus asks us to do what King did—paint a picture of a morally better world in a way that deeply engages us. It aims to draw us toward something grand and lovely. In short, the first and primary use of moral vision is *inspiration*.

Of course the civil rights movement was against things: discrimination, disenfranchisement, the routine terrorization of whole populations. It was vital to take a stand against deeply entrenched hatefulness and violence. Again, though, the movement never defined itself in predominantly negative terms. What it *opposed* was not the fundamental point. Always the language, the imagery, even the demonstrations and legal briefs and political platforms,

were framed in terms of ideals and hopes. That is why King's speech is the iconic speech. It was actually a "Dream" that overcame the guns and the spiteful and sullen obstructionism that seemed to have all the power.

It could have been argued—in fact it was argued, all the time, by the "realists"—that dreaming was a luxury. But who would remember King's great speech today if he had put all the same points negatively? Suppose he'd said it this way:

I have a *nightmare* that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will *never* be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a *nightmare* that . . . the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will *never* be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. . . .

These are exactly the same points, only the tone is reversed. Here racial equality is presented only as a way to stay slightly ahead of moral disaster. The feeling is aversive, unwelcome, deeply discouraging. We may go forward, but we will always be looking backward in fear and heartache and guilt. What's inspiring about that?

King, by contrast, invites us to something wonderful. That is what compelled people and spoke so powerfully to the moment. King showed us a future that we want to run forward to greet. That is inspiration!

The "pull" of inspiration is familiar. I am sure that the point here is not a surprise. Yet it seems that we need reminding of it again and again. It is far more common to frame moral arguments in negative and uninspiring ways.

For instance, consider environmental ethics today. In the popular impression, environmentalists are the very model of nay-sayers: opposed to this, worried sick over that, ill-disposed by reflex to almost any human impact on nature. The Voice of Doom. We may listen and adjust, yes, but unhappily and with a constant sense of worry. Once again we are just trying to stay one step ahead of nightmare and disaster.

Things may indeed be dire. But surely this is not the whole story. Underneath the heartache and the worry, once again, is (and surely *must* be) something else: *love* for Earth, love for the more-than-human wonders that surround us and the wonder of life itself. Environmentalism too has dreams:

We have a dream that our own children and our children's children's children will be able to freely drink the waters of rushing streams and breathe deep in the morning air and see the glittering stars at night.

We have a dream that we will at last learn to treasure the purple mountain majesties and the great wild creatures of this land—and give them the space that they require to flourish in their own ways.

We have a dream that the children of loggers and the children of tree-huggers will one day work together in a vibrant forest from which they can take what they need without taking its vibrancy.

This is not just stating the obvious: it is changing the key. Here environmental ethics clearly and emphatically presents itself as *for* something, not just against things. Just as King did, it does not push but pulls us toward something, and something widely compelling and inspiring as well. How much farther such an environmentalism might go!

TO CLARIFY

Moral visions, I have said, aim to be emphatically *for* something, not just against something. Sometimes, though, it is not so clear what we are actually for. Certainly it may be unclear to others. The day-to-day, public face of moral (and other) struggles is often critical and negative because, for one thing, we are often driven by reaction to daily events. Proactive thinking takes more foresight and planning. But what we are *for* may also be, or become, unclear even to ourselves. Maybe we are wholly consumed by the fight against something and in the tumult of opposition we have lost sight of the ideals that originally drew us to the struggle or to the issue originally. I've suggested that this is sometimes true of today's environmentalism, for example. Or maybe we fear that it is only our opposition to something unites us with our current allies. Or maybe the positive goal or ideal is actually complex and unclear or so new that it is barely worked out.

In all of these cases, the imperative to work out positive and whole moral visions helps to clarify things. Spelling out the ideal—the vision—makes it clear to others what we really stand for, as well as making it clear to ourselves what we really stand for. Usually we can use the reminders. And even more importantly, it can serve as an insistent prompt to *figure out*, when need be, what we really stand for. What *do* we want? What *do* we most deeply value? What specific ideals should we serve?

In the last decade or so, it has become popular for organizations at all levels to work out Mission Statements, sometimes coupled with Vision Statements as well. The general aim is to spell out the organization's purpose, what it hopes to contribute, perhaps also how it is distinct from others—affirmative and generally whole visions. It might seem as though this should be an easy project. Usually, though, it proves to be surprisingly difficult. Consumed by day-to-day and often oppositional activities, members may be surprised and even unnerved by the invitation to step back and carefully state the most basic goals and mission of the organization in a positive and precise enough way that the resultant mission statement can guide the organization's future development. Yet when they are finished, they usually have worked their way to something powerful and unifying.

Working out positive visions can also force difficult but necessary new kinds of thinking. A good example is the so-called "Not in my backyard" or "NIMBY" phenomenon well known to city planners and others involved in decisions about siting facilities like new mass transit facilities, power plants, or

waste-processing facilities that often serve the public good city-wide (or so it's argued) but that impose costs such as noise, pollution, and eyesores on people who live right next to them. Neighborhoods often organize to resist such facilities in their "backyards." The problem, of course, is that the facilities must go in *someone's* backyard if they are to be built at all. Typically, then, they end up going where opposition is least well-organized, which are often the poorest and already most disempowered areas—already an old pattern.

What would happen if such neighborhood organizations were challenged to work out a positive vision? Then it would not be enough to simply oppose the facility in their backyards: they would have to offer some positive proposal, a vision of where it ought to go instead. If not in their backyards, then in whose? In this way, ideally, neighborhoods would be leveraged into taking a city-wide view of things. They could no longer just say NO; they would have to work with other neighborhoods as well as city planners to devise a plan that works best for everyone, a plan to which everyone could say YES. As you can imagine, the process of arriving at such "visions" is both difficult and powerful. Yet it is, after all, what needs to be done.

Of course, there is another possible response too. If we are unwilling, on due consideration, to put a facility such as a new waste-processing facility in *anyone's* "backyard"—if it seems irredeemably unfair to any neighborhood—then the only honest course is to figure out how to do without it. Then it is everyone's moral responsibility to reduce our wastes to the point that it is not needed—which might well be a good idea for all sorts of other economic and ecological reasons too, of course. The positive vision and goal is now a system of much more deliberate and inventive use and recycling of materials that formerly were wasted. And again, this is a widely shareable—perhaps sometimes the only fully shareable—vision, though it also asks a great deal of us . . . so much more than NO. Clarity!

TO MAKE CHANGE REALISTIC

Yet another general use of moral visions is actually to make change realistic. In a variety of ways, we can seek to bring ourselves together around visions, rather than defining our goals narrowly and in partisan ways to exclude others and orient ourselves toward "victory" over those who we frame as opponents or even enemies. Together, embracing shared goals rather than entrenching ourselves in opposition, we are able to effectively and reliably move forward.

Again, many of the tools from chapter 13 apply, most notably the tools for re-framing problems. When we find ourselves in deep-rooted opposition, finding a shareable vision enjoins us to look farther into the background of the troublesome issue to try to head it off, and transform it into something more manageable. **Going Farther** #14 re-approached the abortion issue with this strategy in mind, for example, noting along the way that the two supposedly irreconcilably opposed sides have already worked together on a number of initiatives, such as

comprehensive child-support reform. Moral visioning offers us a way of thinking about ethics that highlights and encourages this sort of collaboration. Consider what this approach would mean extended to the debate about gun control, say, or assisted suicide or serious reductions in carbon dioxide emissions. Movement is possible, but it takes a different approach than we are used to.

Take the example of environmental ethics once again. Unfortunately, it has often set itself up as so sharply opposed to our other values that it makes the way forward hard to see at all. It can seem that the problem is our entire orientation to the world: our “anthropocentrism”—that is, our human-centeredness—which, according to the usual argument, underlies and afflicts all of our other values, from the economic to the religious. An environmental philosopher myself, I will say that I sympathize with this perspective. At times it seems that the problem really does go that deep, and consequently that an alternative moral vision stands at an almost unbridgeable distance from where our culture at large stands now. And yet things cannot be left here. If they are, nothing will change—or else change, when it does come, is likely to be catastrophic and ill-considered.

Working out an alternative environmental vision on the largest scale is a vital project, then, though it is far from clear what it could and should look like. The very fact that there are already multiple competing environmental visions, or at least sketches of alternative systems of environmental ethics, is a sufficient sign of that. More to the point, though, bearing in mind the need for what we have called *whole* visions, if we are to make substantial change now we need environmental visions that connect with today’s concerns and values.

Critics continue to argue, for example, that nature is a “special interest”: that it doesn’t really fit with our other values, or with most people’s values, and indeed that it is at odds with more central values that most of us hold, such as a good standard of living and a healthy economy. Some years back a memorable newsmagazine headline—it happened to be about the standoff between timber interests and defenders of the endangered spotted owls in the Pacific Northwest—read “Owl Versus Man.” That stark image of opposing interests struck a nerve. We need to know how environmental values fit in.

For one thing, we need a vision of a healthy nature that is not only compatible with a healthy economy but also crucial to it. Actually, though, this is easy to spell out. Even in purely economic terms, most environmental measures are arguably more beneficial in the long run than one-shot exploitation, which enriches a few investors but leaves communities and countries poorer, indeed often wrecked and displaced. (Think of clear-cutting forests, or rainforest burning—what remains is *nothing*.) Local economies further into solar and wind power typically have fuller employment and healthier populations than those more invested in oil and nuclear power. Environmentalists can and should make that argument, even when they/we might also hold out for an alternative economics in the long run.

Of course we need to cut and use some trees. But a shareable environmental vision could hold that what we really need is a sustainable timber industry, using wood in a more intensive, craft-based way, rather than shipping massive amounts of raw wood abroad and/or pulping it for plywood, as timber corporations do at present. Imagine forest communities once again developing furniture shops and specialty woodcrafts—living with the forests rather than “off” the forests until they’re gone. The wood stays at home, and every tree, every log, invites a great deal more labor than it takes merely to cut it down and ship it out. That kind of logging, unlike the present practice, would have a future—better for loggers *and* the forests. And it is compelling *now* as well.

Environmental ethics can also argue that we are working with far too narrow a picture of human values. We do value comfortable living, of course, but we also value many other things, like keeping awe and respect alive in response to nature—say, for endangered owls and the old-growth forests that are their only homes—or just having natural and wild places to go to see the stars and rediscover the tanagers and the turtles. These are genuine and entirely shareable values too—indeed they are already emphatically shared. We are speaking of the whole encompassing Earth, the air and the water and the living communities of land and sea which all of us, and all of our children and our children’s children, and all of the other creatures depend upon. Remember how I stated the environmental “dream” earlier. These are hardly “special” interests. They are universal, common, basic interests, which (quite literally) ground all others. It’s the short-term economic enrichment of a few that is arguably the real “special interest” here. A whole vision brings us back to basics—the “big picture” indeed!

In that sense, titles like “Owl Versus Man” sell “Man”—that is, humans—terribly short. Our interests, our values, are not just economic. The unifying vision is one that is better for us *and* nature—for us as *part* of nature. Indeed, we could almost say that recognizing and embracing ourselves as part of nature *is* the vision at the deepest level. Maybe a new environmental ethic does not stand at so totally unbridgeable a distance after all.

TO BE ETHICAL!

There is one more key use and value of moral vision: it is itself an ethical mode of engagement.

Consider again the distinction between victory and vision. Victory, of course, is a put-down. It is true that, there are times when certain practices may need to be put down. There are true moral evils in the world. In general, though, it is all too easy to slide from putting down certain positions to putting down *people*, and even to make put-downs our main mode of moral argument and our only vision of the resolutions of moral (or other) issues and contentions. This is one reason why, as we have noted from the very beginning of this book, it is ironic but all too common that ethical thinking and

argument is itself often practiced in highly unethical ways and with harmful outcomes—harmful to others and very likely also in the long run to ourselves. All too often, even if we try to state a positive moral vision, it is narrow and partisan. It is all too tempting to simply picture the victory of our side. People with opposite views become mere obstacles, at best heedless or blind, or, worse, evil themselves. And of course they see us the same way.

Moral vision invites us to another approach. In this too it is more ambitious, and yes, more idealistic. A shareable vision aims to make allies of others. It aims to speak to, and include, almost everyone: not to categorize others as blind or heedless or evil, but to appeal to their best aspirations, as we hope they might to ours—whether others expect such an approach or not. I have been arguing that this is a more effective mode of engagement—more positive, more inspiring, more inviting—but it is also, for the very same reasons, more *ethical*.

TOWARD A NEW VISION OF AGING

Our society's approach to aging and the aged is a prime area for rethinking. Here is a prime place (and a prime new example) for the work of Moral Vision. What could moral vision show us here?

Today we learn to think of aging as a slow-motion disaster, a decline and fading away—something to be lamented and postponed as long as possible. Again we find ethics mostly playing defense, heart-aching and limited in its hope. But could this picture be dramatically shifted? What could a vigorous and rigorous affirmative view show us instead?

We might start by borrowing a “What If?” kind of question from our creative-thinking toolbox. *What if* aging were instead deeply treasured and revered? We might even go in for full-scale “reversal” (remember?) and ask if aging might even be welcomed? *How could* it be so?

There is a visionary as well as creative question. And of course, at first it may sound impossible or even irresponsible to ask. Yet notice that the moment that we ask it, a number of other things shift too. For one, we may suddenly remember that aging *has* been viewed in this way by many cultures in the past, especially by indigenous peoples (and still is viewed this way by some). The coming of wisdom, even blurring of the lines between ancestors and the living as one moves close to ancestor-hood oneself . . . such a thing has even been eagerly anticipated. Perhaps our present view of aging is actually much more limited to our own specific society than it seems at first—and moreover, we might well expect that we have much to learn from those alternative views of aging. Remember another of chapter 13's maxims for creative rethinking: Compare and contrast. Surely there is some accumulated human wisdom on the subject, besides the contemporary sidelining and devaluation of aging and the aged that we acquire, willy-nilly, from a

culture preoccupied with youth, activity, and speed, a culture whose main provision for old people is medication, as it mostly pushes them out of the mainstream of life. Surely it is at least worth looking.

Another shift in our thinking prompted by the visionary question might be a provocation to notice the subtle and not-so-subtle devaluations of aging and of the aged that surround us daily—and to re-imagine them, even in radical ways. In a store recently, for example, I saw a flyer for a skin cream that announces “Miraculous Results!”—that is, it turned out, a skin that “doesn’t reveal your age.” No wrinkles! Ordinarily I’d probably not have thought much of this. Rethinking aging in a more visionary way, though, what struck me first was that, as I grow older myself, I increasingly appreciate the signs of age—that is, *maturity*—in others, such as, yes, wrinkles. Remembering then another of chapter 13’s maxims—Exaggerate!—I started thinking what it might be like to live in a society that (yes) *adored* wrinkles. Geriatrician Bill Thomas expands on this idea in his book *What Are Old People For?*

The idea may seem laughable at first, but for millennia, living to a ripe old age was an exceptional achievement and recognized as such by society. . . . What if the war on wrinkles were replaced by a crazy new wave of wrinkle-promoting ingenuity? Any desire to intentionally age one’s face seems bizarre to those reared in a youth-dominated culture. It upsets unspoken assumptions about aging. However, if just for a moment, that we lived in a world that embraced the arrival of [what Marilyn Monroe once called] a face with character. . . . Such a society would swoon over wrinkled actors, artists, and models. . . . Spas and retreats would promise “You’ll look ten years older in just two weeks.” It really would be a different world.

Here, in short, is an invitation to a radical new vision of aging as a whole. As Thomas puts it, quite exactly, “It upsets unspoken assumptions about aging”—for sure! Yet here we also catch a first glimpse of a vastly better world not only for the aged themselves but for all of us. All of us are aging, after all. “The aged” are not some alien species, forever distant, affable or cranky but anyway not *us* . . . but in fact who we ourselves will someday be, if not already. Arguably it would be a better whole culture, too, in which old people might once again be welcomed into, and grow into, the role of *elders* that we might be able to adopt and adapt from indigenous people’s practice.

What would it take to create a culture that honors age in this way? For one thing, rather than build itself so wholly around the young and their demands and needs, it would have to be a culture that asks how to accommodate the needs of older people, starting with technologies more user-friendly for them. Poor eyesight would not be a problem if signs and print were bigger. More generally, the old would be expected to live at the *centers* of life rather than exiled to the irrelevant and dependent peripheries. We’d look forward to *pro-tirement* rather than re-tirement: that is, the graduation to greater rather

than lesser tasks. Maybe you couldn't even *begin* certain kinds of work until you were, say, seventy-five. Again: a whole different culture.

And what kind of work might that be? Is it possible that it is even work that elders are already doing—and arguably have always done—but today has been made mostly invisible, not recognized or honored by our society, and systematically pushed to the edges and dis-abled as a result?

READING 32

“Eldertopia” (Selections from *What Are Old People For?*)

BILL THOMAS

BILL THOMAS (b. 1959) is an author and activist on issues of aging and nursing-home reform. Early on, as a doctor at nursing homes, Thomas encountered first-hand the profound loneliness of his patients. At first he had no resources for dealing with it, and pushed it aside, as so many do, as an inevitable aspect of aging. But it struck him repeatedly and forcefully, and finally set him off on long journey both for major reform in the design and administration of old-age homes and, even more fundamentally, in the social status of the aged and aging. He is the founder of The Eden Alternative, a philosophy and program to de-institutionalize nursing homes in favor of what he calls Greenhouses, small, home-like environments where people can live a full and interactive life. With major grant support, Greenhouses are being built in all 50 states as well as more than 20 countries around the world.

Thomas's book *What Are Old People For?* has all of the aspects of moral vision pointed out in this chapter. He certainly offers an affirmative vision: the first premise is that aging and the aged are enormously valuable. It is a whole vision, in the sense that he asks us to re-envision an entire set of interrelated factors and changes that together will transform the culture and life for all of us, the old and the not-yet old—thus the vision is emphatically shareable as well. And it certainly is idealistic. He even calls the alternative system he pictures “Eldertopia,” and has the audacity to subtitle his book *How Elders Will Save the World*.

Thomas argues that old age is not just a form of declining adulthood. It is *different* from adulthood, he holds, just as adulthood is different from childhood. “There is something vital and true to be grasped,” he writes, “within the distinctively human

Bill Thomas, *What Are Old People For?* Vanderwyk & Burnham; 1st Edition (Sept. 25 2004)

experience of growing old.” Other cultures have known it: Thomas asks us to consider tribal cultures, for example, who literally initiate their elders into *post-adulthood*—in fact, the most profound honor the tribe can give.

At another point in his book, Thomas relates of a talk with an Alaskan tribal member who even considers Alzheimer’s dementia (memory loss) not as a tragedy but as a *gift*. She said, he reports, “that when an elder living with dementia made reference to seeing and speaking with long-dead relatives, it was taken as proof that the elder had been gifted with the ability to have one foot in this world and one foot in the spirit world.” I have heard others emphasize that elders across traditional Native American cultures are considered to be wise partly *because* they are no longer preoccupied with the day-to-day details of life (a little short-term memory loss helps here) but correspondingly remember the deeper and longer-held things, the tribal memories and the bigger pictures. A vital role too—and one that today’s culture, arguably, suffers for lacking. Talk about a new perspective!

Thomas points out that the generation now hitting the leading edge of “post-adulthood” is the ’60s generation. More than any generation in history, he says, “they have demonstrated an eagerness to challenge and even overturn long-established beliefs. There is little to suggest that the role of the quiet, uncomplaining grandparent will appeal to them.” But, he continues, “*what they are missing—what we are all missing—is a vision of elderhood with its own claim to greatness*” (my emphasis). Listen as he paints a picture of such a possible vision—for us all.

The relationships that have powered human cultural advancement for tens of thousands of years are a complex set of intergenerational interactions. Taken together, they form the engine that has shaped us, served us, blunted our worst tendencies, and magnified our best. Given the terrible might of modern industrial society, we need this engine more than ever before. The cult of adulthood is insistent in its claims that old age is irrelevant and possibly on the edge of its own extinction (given sufficient progress in pharmaceutical laboratories). Though few actually believe that old age can be vanquished, it is easy to wish that it were so. Many find refuge in treasured illusions about traditional aging. In truth, the old way of growing old was never as good as we like to remember it being and is especially ill suited to the society in which we live today. We really have no choice but to look ahead. The times demand that we create a new elderhood—one that fits the way we live now. We need this new elderhood not only for ourselves (we all deserve a better, richer, more meaningful old age) but for people of all ages.

Public discourse, however, operates from very different assumptions. Within its realm, longevity is imagined to be of concern solely to the aged, those who care for them, and those who pay for that care. We are constantly reminded of how expensive this is, and like the miser who feels he may have been cheated, we expect a precise accounting of what has been paid and what has been delivered. Former Colorado governor Richard Lamm begins his essay "The Moral Imperative of Limiting Elderly Health Entitlements" by noting that "one of the great challenges in America's future is to retire the baby boomers without bankrupting the country or unduly burdening future generations. . . . Age could well be as divisive in the next forty years as race and sex have been for the last forty years."

Given the sums involved and the potentially devastating consequences of mismanagement, much of this concern is warranted. What is missing from the debate, however, is a proper accounting of what elderhood can contribute to society. This side of the ledger is given scant attention by those who can see only the wealth and vigor of adults and the potentially ruinous burden imposed by the aged. Lamm goes on to point out that, regardless of how it may make us feel, decisions will have to be made: "We are a compassionate society and can afford a lot, but we cannot afford everything. No publicly financed health system can ignore the law of diminishing returns. . . . It is necessary to find, among the myriad of things we can do, what practically in a budget we ought to do."

The worldview that former governor Lamm represents places old age outside the pale of productive, contributing adults. They are expensive accessories and, while we may be a "compassionate society," there is a limit to what *we* can do for *them*. I am arguing for a very different conception of elders and elderhood—one that places them (and their needs) within rather than outside the central purposes of our society. What we need is a holistic perspective that appreciates and respects the contributions that people of all ages have made and are now making to the pursuit of happiness and our collective well-being. It should not come as a surprise that our language lacks a word that describes the interdependence that joins young and old. Instead, we have "entitlements" and "cross-generational wealth transfers." The wisdom of living in a multigenerational social structure is ancient, undeniable, and deserving of a word of its own. I like *Eldertopia*:

Eldertopia *noun* A community that improves the quality of life for people of all ages by strengthening and improving the means by which (1) the community protects, sustains, and nurtures its elders, and (2) the elders contribute to the well-being and foresight of the community. An Eldertopia that is blessed with a large number of older people is acknowledged to be "elder-rich" and uses this human capital to the advantage of all.

Our longevity exists, has meaning, and creates value because it provides human beings with a mechanism for improving the lives of people *of all ages*. That mechanism is a pattern of reciprocal relationships that unite the generations. Far from being society's expensive leftovers, elders and the elderhood they inhabit are crucial to the well-being of all.

This assessment highlights the flaws inherent in the accounting systems of the "old-age welfare state." Conventional practice tabulates to the penny the money spent serving the elderly, even as it ignores the vital contributions that our longevity makes to society as a whole. We need a new and much more realistic set of accounting books.

Fortunately, Eldertopia can lead us to a deeper and far more accurate understanding of how longevity completes us. For a start it can shed light on the complex and easily overlooked intergenerational transfers that are essential to people of all ages. The idea of the "greedy geezer" is the product of a society that counts only what the young pay to the old. Becoming more conscious of the contributions that elders make to the young is a good first step in correcting the bias against the old. Fully developed, this more balanced approach can document in black and white why our longevity is a solid investment.

MAPPING ELDERTOPIA

Eldertopia supposes that human communities rely heavily on reciprocal altruism and calls for a detailed accounting of all sides of these exchanges. In its most basic form, such a chart of accounts would include answers to the following questions:

- In what ways and to what extent do elders receive support from adults?
- In what ways do elders contribute ongoing assistance to the adults of the community?
- How are we to recognize and properly value the gentling and acculturation of children by elders?
- In what ways and to what extent do we acknowledge the ongoing assistance and affection given to elders by the children in their lives?

Some of these contributions can be reduced to numerical terms; others cannot. The current public debate surrounding aging

and its entitlements is distorted by the nearly exclusive emphasis that is placed on the financial cost of publicly funded programs and the pitiful lack of attention that is paid to the more qualitative elements of the ongoing exchange between young and old.

In order for any exchange to be fair and just, both parties must fully understand the value of what is being given and received. Alarmist rhetoric of the “plague of locusts” variety becomes shrill precisely because it fails to acknowledge the value of what elders have done, do now, and will continue to contribute to the young. Public officials and academic experts have surprisingly little to say on the subject of how the aged help sustain their families and communities. Studies of volunteerism have lauded the work that senescents and elders do within faith-based and community organizations, and a few studies have even attempted to put a price tag on those contributions. Far greater, though, is the commitment that the aged make to the people they love. Most people suppose that adults support their aged parents with material resources (and many do), but taken as a whole, the elders of our society give more to their children and their children’s families than they receive from them.

Perhaps the most endangered and least appreciated element of the ancient exchange between young and old is the gentling and acculturation of children by elders. Historically, this has taken place exclusively within the family and kinship group. Life in modern society has, of course, disrupted many of these arrangements. Children are increasingly confined to and molded by large, professionally run educational institutions. Elders are segregated, by choice and by fiat, within their own age-specific institutions, facilities, and housing developments. The result is a generation of young unlike any before it, a generation that is growing to maturity without the guiding hand of elders and elderhood. This arrangement penalizes elders as well. Many must live and die without knowing the tender embrace of the very young in their daily lives.

A full accounting of these exchanges, even one that lacked precise values, would alter public policy and reshape public opinion. The material aspect of such an exchange—goods and services—is the easiest to document and can usually be tallied in dollars and cents. But we must also make the informal and private dimensions of the exchange known, and give them their due. Eldertopia is, at its most fundamental level, a path to a new consciousness of age and aging. It sets aside incomplete ideas about dependency and decline and presents instead the dynamic image of an active and ongoing exchange between the generations. Taken seriously, it can help us document the staggering value contained within the global

age boom. It can change how we live together. Consider the following Eldertopian possibilities.

Elders Giving Warmth Elders have always made important contributions to the young of their families and communities. For thousands of years, relationships created between young and old have made life better for both groups. In Eldertopia, all school construction and remodeling projects would include housing and community services for elders. The idea of isolating one group from the other would be seen as the ridiculous waste that it is. Those who sought to provide care and services for the elders would take care to integrate their offerings with the routines and needs of the young. In Eldertopia the wall that separates young and old would have to come down.

Elders Receiving Warmth The myth of independence has led millions of elders to prefer living alone to any form of communal life. This is in spite of the fact that old age, like childbirth, was never meant to be confronted alone. The Meals on Wheels program is intended to improve life for elders living at home by delivering meals to their homes. Because of the expense involved, some programs have turned to weekly deliveries of frozen food instead of daily deliveries of hot meals. Of course, the daily delivery of meals offers much more than food. It also provides what one elder calls “a face at the door.” In the future, daily meal deliveries will be difficult to sustain unless there is a community-wide awareness of the value of bringing human warmth into elders’ lives. In Eldertopia, community leaders would acknowledge that elders cannot live on frozen food alone.

Elders Giving Wisdom Many traditional societies maintain mechanisms whereby the wisdom of elders can be communicated to the leaders of the day. Elder councils, for example, provide a balancing perspective that considers the long-term consequences of any proposed action. Too often in our society, the perspective of elderhood is reduced to just one of many competing interest groups. Eldertopia encourages the formation of elder councils that meet regularly and offer their views on the challenges and opportunities facing the community. The topics addressed might well include matters that the conventional political system would rather sweep under the rug. The media can and should cover the elder council and its deliberations. In Eldertopia, the community as a whole would no longer be deaf to the voices of its elders.

Elders Receiving the Benefits of Technology Advances in technology have done much to improve the well-being of older people,

but so much more could be done. There is a tremendous potential for using ordinary off-the-shelf technology to help elders do more themselves, expand their potential to live independently and in dignity, and maintain vital connections to their community and people they love. We can and should embrace a smart technology that fuses an accurate understanding of the challenges of old age with the best tools that our industrial society has to offer. Eldertopia would ensure that the elders had access to technology capable of aiding the pursuit of the best elderhood possible.

Elderhood's Commitment to Stewardship Elders have long been critical of the adult's desire to get, have, and take all that he or she is capable of getting, having, and taking. The consequences of such avarice can be found in our dirty air and water and the mass extinction of species that is currently in progress. Elders have long spoken for Earth, its living creatures, and the children who are yet to be born. They have not always prevailed, nor should they, but a society that marginalizes elders and the value of their lived experience endangers us all because it removes their concerns from our thoughts. There is much to be done if we are to repair the damage that has been done to the living world that sustains us. Eldertopia would have an Elder Environmental Conservation Corps that would tackle projects that would strengthen the health and vitality of the natural world. In Eldertopia, nature would have an influential new ally.

Elders Receiving Well-Being from Nature There is a dawning awareness that nature should be an important part of any setting intended to improve health or assist in healing. Eventually, the inclusion of nature in plans for these environments will seem as essential and ordinary as planning for doors and windows. In Eldertopia, the community would organize itself to see that the healing effect that comes with a connection to nature is made available to every elder.

Eldertopia is a useful concept because we can use it to improve the well-being of all members of society. It makes explicit the ancient patterns of exchange between the young and the old. We all benefit when these connections are strengthened and enriched, just as we all suffer when they are ignored or trampled. The most elder-rich period of human history is upon us. How we regard and make use of this windfall of elders will define the world in which we live. Eldertopia restores aging to longevity and returns the aged

to a worthy elderhood. Even more than that, it restores elderhood to its rightful place in the human life cycle. In this way, it creates the possibility of a better life for us all.

NEW DIRECTIONS

The word *Eldertopia* is tinged with impossibility. Sophisticated adults, after all, feel that they have outgrown utopias—left them behind on their journey into the future. We should not be so hasty. The utopian ideal has long served to reveal the gap between what is and what ought to be. At its best, it is distilled imagination placed into the service of everyday life. Utopias have the power to change how we think about our times and our selves. Eldertopia is notable because it offers not the violent disruption of revolution but a patient, gentle return to an evolutionary process that began long ago and that is already deep in our bones. Because it is founded on millennia of human experience, Eldertopia requires neither federal legislation nor a court order in order to come to life. In fact, we can begin creating Eldertopia today.

Marcel Proust observed, “The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes.” This is the challenge of Eldertopia. How can we convert ordinary situations and daily decisions into extraordinary opportunities to explore a new way of seeing, thinking, and acting? How do we bring the complex web of interdependencies that define a healthy community out into the open? How can we cope with the grinding efficiency of the cult of adulthood, which is, increasingly, putting the true nature of our longevity beyond our reach?

This alienation is not inevitable. Not a day, not a moment passes when we do not have the opportunity to move our society toward the ideals of Eldertopia. The importance of this idea grows with the gathering power of adulthood and the distortions that come of living in a world run by and for adults. There is a limit to how long we can continue to discount and dismiss the guiding intelligence of elders and elderhood. How does society acknowledge the bilateral nature of the community’s relationship with its elders? How do our decisions and priorities enlarge or diminish our ability to sustain this exchange? Does the item you are hearing about at a meeting, reading about in the newspaper, or discussing within your family aid in the rebirth of elderhood, or does it simply extend the power of adults and adulthood?

READING 33

“The Space Crone”

URSULA K. LEGUIN

URSULA K. LEGUIN (b. 1929) is known as an American author of novels, children’s books, and short stories, mainly in the genres of fantasy and science fiction, as well as poetry and essays. Her work depicts futuristic or imaginary alternative worlds—often with alternative politics, gender roles, religion, or relations to nature. It is visionary in many ways. LeGuin has been called America’s greatest living science fiction writer, although she herself has said she would prefer just to be known as an American novelist. She’s a bit of a Space Crone herself—humanity should be so lucky that she’d get the chance.

Here is another provocation to re-envision aging, this one cross-cut by questions of gender—for older women are doubly discriminated against in today’s culture, because contemporary culture not only so values youth and adulthood in general, but also because of the pervasive reduction of women to their beauty, fertility, and sexual attractiveness, again stereotypically (very) young. *Hag*, *crone*, even *witch*: these are our society’s lurking images for the older women.

What can Moral Vision offer here? Along the lines that Bill Thomas suggests, the distinctive offerings of older people in general can be highlighted: warmth, continuity, patience, a longer sense of time. But what about the distinctive additional offerings of older women? Here, in a renowned and edgy short essay, Ursula LeGuin proposes that older women embrace and reclaim a re-imagined role of *Crone*. Post-menopause is a “dangerous and sacred condition,” she says: only the bravest, already used to shape-shifting, should go here. But women, she argues, have unique practice at this already, and why not bravery too?

Moreover, there is another twist in this story that is completely unexpected but also morally challenging and intriguing in its own right. If only one human being were to become humanity’s representative to some alien civilization, LeGuin asks, who should it be? You can imagine the usual competitors—she names some of them—but crones would not be on anyone’s list, not even their own. Still, some unassuming but experienced Crone is LeGuin’s nominee.

Consider her reasons. (Oh, and who would *you* send?) Consider also the question itself. What is most important to represent

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about humanity to some alien civilization—to the stars? What values—moral and other—should shape such a choice? And if, as LeGuin suggests, they are not the values that shape society today, what needs to be done about that?

The menopause is probably the least glamorous topic imaginable; and this is interesting, because it is one of the very few topics to which cling some shreds and remnants of taboo. A serious mention of menopause is usually met with uneasy silence; a sneering reference to it is usually met with relieved sniggers. Both the silence and the sniggering are pretty sure indications of taboo.

Most people would consider the old phrase “change of life” a euphemism for the medical term “menopause,” but I, who am now going through the change, begin to wonder if it isn’t the other way round. “Change of life” is too blunt a phrase, too factual. “Menopause,” with its chime-suggestion of a mere pause after which things go on as before, is reassuringly trivial.

But the change is not trivial, and I wonder how many women are brave enough to carry it out wholeheartedly. They give up their reproductive capacity with more or less of a struggle, and when it’s gone they think that’s all there is to it. Well, at least I don’t get the Curse any more, they say, and the only reason I felt so depressed sometimes was hormones. Now I’m myself again. But this is to evade the real challenge, and to lose, not only the capacity to ovulate, but the opportunity to become a Crone.

In the old days women who survived long enough to attain the menopause more often accepted the challenge. They had, after all, had practice. They had already changed their life radically once before, when they ceased to be virgins and became mature women/wives/matrons/mothers/mistresses/whores/etc. This change involved not only the physiological alterations of puberty—the shift from barren childhood to fruitful maturity—but a socially recognized alteration of being: a change of condition from the sacred to the profane.

With the secularization of virginity now complete, so that the once awesome term “virgin” is now a sneer or at best a slightly dated word for a person who hasn’t copulated yet, the opportunity of gaining or regaining the dangerous/sacred condition of being at the Second Change has ceased to be apparent.

Virginity is now a mere preamble or waiting room to be got out of as soon as possible; it is without significance. Old age is similarly a waiting room, where you go after life’s over and wait for cancer or a stroke. The years before and after the menstrual years are vestigial: the only meaningful condition left to women is that of fruitfulness.

Curiously, this restriction of significance coincided with the development of chemicals and instruments that make fertility itself a meaningless or at least secondary characteristic of female maturity. The significance of maturity now is not the capacity to conceive but the mere ability to have sex. As this ability is shared by pubescents and by postclimacterics, the blurring of distinctions and elimination of opportunities is almost complete. There are no rites of passage because there is no significant change. The Triple Goddess has only one face: Marilyn Monroe's, maybe. The entire life of a woman from ten or twelve through seventy or eighty has become secular, uniform, changeless. As there is no longer any virtue in virginity, so there is no longer any meaning in menopause. It requires fanatical determination now to become a Crone.

Women have thus, by imitating the life condition of men, surrendered a very strong position of their own. . . .

Menopause Manor is not merely a defensive stronghold, however. It is a house or household, fully furnished with the necessities of life. In abandoning it, women have narrowed their domain and impoverished their souls. There are things the Old Woman can do, say, and think that the Woman cannot do, say, or think. The Woman has to give up more than her menstrual periods before she can do, say, or think them. She has got to change her life.

The nature of that change is now clearer than it used to be. Old age is not virginity but a third and new condition; the virgin must be celibate, but the crone need not. There was a confusion there, which the separation of female sexuality from reproductive capacity, via modern contraceptives, has cleared up. Loss of fertility does not mean loss of desire and fulfillment. But it does entail a change, a change involving matters even more important—if I may venture a heresy—than sex.

The woman who is willing to make that change must become pregnant with herself, at last. She must bear herself, her third self, her old age, with travail and alone. Not many will help her with that birth. Certainly no male obstetrician will time her contractions, inject her with sedatives, stand ready with forceps, and neatly stitch up the torn membranes. It's hard even to find an old-fashioned midwife, these days. That pregnancy is long, that labor is hard. Only one is harder, and that's the final one, the one that men also must suffer and perform.

It may well be easier to die if you have already given birth to others or yourself, at least once before. This would be an argument for going through all the discomfort and embarrassment of becoming a Crone. Anyhow it seems a pity to have a built-in rite of passage and to dodge it, evade it, and pretend nothing has changed. That is to dodge and evade one's womanhood, to pretend one's like a

man. Men, once initiated, never get the second chance. They never change again. That's their loss, not ours. Why borrow poverty?

Certainly the effort to remain unchanged, young, when the body gives so impressive a signal of change as the menopause, is gallant; but it is a stupid, self-sacrificial gallantry, better befitting a boy of twenty than a woman of forty-five or fifty. Let the athletes die young and laurel-crowned. Let the soldiers earn the Purple Hearts. Let women die old, white-crowned, with human hearts.

If a space ship came by from the friendly natives of the fourth planet of Altair, and the polite captain of the space ship said, "We have room for one passenger; will you spare us a single human being, so that we may converse at leisure during the long trip back to Altair and learn from an exemplary person the nature of the race?"—I suppose what most people would want to do is provide them with a fine, bright, brave young man, highly educated and in peak physical condition. . . . There would surely be hundreds, thousands of volunteers, just such young men, all worthy. But I would not pick any of them. Nor would I pick any of the young women who would volunteer, some out of magnanimity and intellectual courage, others out of a profound conviction that Altair couldn't possibly be worse for a woman than Earth is.

What I would do is go down to the local Woolworth's, or the local village marketplace, and pick an old woman, over sixty, from behind the costume jewelry counter or the betel-nut booth. Her hair would not be red or blonde or lustrous dark, her skin would not be dewy fresh, she would not have the secret of eternal youth. She might, however, show you a small snapshot of her grandson, who is working in Nairobi. She is a bit vague about where Nairobi is, but extremely proud of the grandson. She has worked hard at small, unimportant jobs all her life, jobs like cooking, cleaning, bringing up kids, selling little objects of adornment or pleasure to other people. She was a virgin once, a long time ago, and then a sexually potent fertile female, and then went through menopause. She has given birth several times and faced death several times—the same times. She is facing the final birth/death a little more nearly and clearly every day now. Sometimes her feet hurt something terrible. She never was educated to anything like her capacity, and that is a shameful waste and a crime against humanity, but so common a crime should not and cannot be hidden from Altair. And anyhow she's not dumb. She has a stock of sense, wit, patience, and experiential shrewdness, which the Altaireans might, or might not, perceive as wisdom. If they are wiser than we, then of course we don't know how they'd perceive it. But if they are wiser than we, they may know how to perceive that inmost mind and

heart which we, working on mere guess and hope, proclaim to be humane. In any case, since they are curious and kindly, let's give them the best we have to give.

The trouble is, she will be very reluctant to volunteer: "What would an old woman like me do on Altair?" she'll say. "You ought to send one of those scientist men, they can talk to those funny-looking green people. Maybe Dr. Kissinger should go. . . ." [For an update, substitute the name of any contemporary and somewhat morally dubious elder [male] statesman here.—AW] It will be very hard to explain to her that we want her to go because only a person who has experienced, accepted, and acted the entire human condition—the essential quality of which is Change—can fairly represent humanity. "Me?" she'll say, just a trifle slyly. "But I never did anything."

But it won't wash. She knows, though she won't admit it, that Dr. Kissinger has not gone and will never go where she has gone, that the scientists and the shamans have not done what she has done. Into the space ship, Granny.

QUICK REFERENCE: MORAL VISION

- Moral vision is *affirmative* rather than negative. Be visibly and energetically *for* something, rather than primarily against something.
- Moral vision is *idealistic*. Envision the full realization of certain moral values.
- Moral vision is *whole*. Envision systematic, large-scale change affecting many aspects of the world, rather than just small moral readjustments of the world we know.
- Moral vision aims to *bring values into congruence*. Aim to be inviting to all: aim for the widest appeal, rather than making narrow, oppositional, and partisan arguments.



FOR REVIEW

1. What are the four aspects of moral vision?
2. How is Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech an example of moral vision?
3. What is a *whole* vision?
4. Why is whole vision necessary?

5. Explain the text's distinction between *vision* and *victory*. How does this relate to moral vision?
6. What are the main uses of moral vision?
7. How can the search for a vision result in greater clarity? Give an example.
8. Why does the text claim that vision-seeking is itself ethical?
9. Does environmentalism need a moral vision? A whole vision? Such as?
10. How does Bill Thomas exercise moral vision in his proposal for "Eldertopia"?
11. According to Thomas, what *are* old people for?
12. Why does Ursula K. LeGuin nominate a "Crone" for humanity's representative to the stars? And how is this a moral vision?



FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

14.1 REFRAMING MORAL POSITIONS AS VISIONS

We do not always put moral positions as visions. Environmentalism was the text's case in point, but there are many others. But, as the text argues, things may look very different if we did.

Take this as a challenge. Take prominent moral positions on issues that interest you, and reframe them as visions. Do this for your own positions, for sure—and just as important, try to do it for moral positions to which you are indifferent or opposed. Remember, it's not just a matter of stating the position or of stating it fairly and accurately. These are important skills in their own right, but you've already practiced them in previous chapters. The challenge here is to find the vision, the "dream." Do a little research if you need to. Are some of these dreams already articulated? Why don't we hear more of them?

Can you do this for both sides (all sides) in the abortion debate, for example? Look also at the different positions on capital punishment, sexuality, gay marriage, business ethics, welfare, and any other issue that interests and engages you.

14.2 REFRAMING VISIONS AS WHOLE VISIONS

Use this exercise as a follow-up to the last one. You have now laid out some of the visions that lie behind current moral contentions. Now try to develop them as *whole* visions. That is, don't leave them just "dreamy." Make them as integrated with other values and as practical as you can.

Abortion, for example. Here again both sides' positions can be better expressed as visions, in fact as complex whole visions. Again, I leave it to you to spell out the "dreams"—just notice that they are *big* dreams. They are not simply about abortion. Passionate defenders of "life," say, would hardly rest content if *Roe v. Wade* were merely overturned. There are a host of other things to do: strengthen the family, enhance prenatal and postnatal care, speak to the hypersexualization of everything teenaged. Work it out.

Use your other ethical tools as well. For example, as you become more detailed, be alert for ways in which different dreams intersect and overlap. Passionate *defenders* of abortion rights, for example, would hardly rest content if *Roe* were merely secured either. Once again there are a host of other things to do, such as . . . strengthen the family, enable adequate prenatal and postnatal care, and speak to the hypersexualization of everything teenaged, as well as promote equal access to child care, family leave policies, and rethinking the relations between the sexes in general. Common ground here looks extensive. Of course disagreements remain, even fundamental ones. But again: the "big pictures" are not pure and simple opposites. Whole visions complexify, overlap, draw us back into connection and interdependence, make it possible for us to go forward together.

Your challenge, then, is to take up this same sort of *whole* visioning for some of the other issues that interest and engage you. Gay rights? Business ethics? What about that slogan, "If you want peace, work for justice"? What about the work ethic? Chapter 7 hints that perhaps the work ethic is evolving into something new. But what? What is the vision? How much further might the vision go?

14.3 PRACTICING RADICAL IMAGINATION

If things really do not have to be the way they are at the moment, then whenever we confront something morally problematic or even just morally neutral, we can always ask: how else could this be? What seems to be a "given" can be reapproached as a *question*—and, often, a fairly radical question. Quite seriously and practically, we can ask: why? And the natural follow-up is: How could it be different?

Bill Thomas rethinks aging *radically* in the selection from *What Are Old People For?* Again, it's not just a matter of making slightly nicer nursing homes or a few more programs at the Senior Center. *Everything* changes. The possibility of a different kind of *culture* comes into view. Take a deep breath and sit up straight. This is not for the faint of heart.

Yet it is worth a try—worth at least knowing what vision on this scale might actually feel like. Can you imagine other such changes, then, in other areas of life?

Of course this is easier said than done. Remember, though: chapter 13 already has offered you a range of creative-thinking tools. Your task now is just to push them further. Invite *really* exotic associations. Exaggerate once, and then

do it again. And again. Revisit *many* outlying aspects of the original problem. *Seriously* look for opportunities in the problems. If it is possible to see even dementia as an opportunity (of course it also needs another name, like “timeless vision”), then where are the limits?

In 2003, worldwide demonstrations against the pending military action in Iraq were organized on the Internet in the space of a week. The result was the largest mass action in the history of the planet. This already is an amazing and suggestive fact, regardless of what you think about the war itself. But suppose it were only the beginning? How much further could we extrapolate? What if we now used the Internet to build ongoing worldwide organizations based on direct contact between people, rather than always mediated by nation-states? Suppose we even built a whole new representative structure out of this—with representatives’ “districts” being virtual rather than geographical, say, including people already in contact with each other all over the globe? If state and land don’t have to be geographically distinct, we could also begin to visualize a totally new approach to, say, ongoing struggles between two peoples claiming the same land.

Why are we so preoccupied with the Death Penalty but never ask about its opposite: something, I suppose, like a *Life Reward*? Which would be—what? Something spectacular, maybe, like a state subsidy, for life, for people who are totally extraordinary—who have done something that is as ethically wonderful as murdering someone is awful. If there were such a thing, how would one qualify for such a Life Reward? Want to try?

Wars don’t just make themselves; why should peace? What if the world developed an international reconstruction and peace-keeping force? What kinds of skills would such a “force” call for? Who would join? (Think afresh here: it wouldn’t have to be, perhaps should not be, the youngest and most able-bodied.) How would it work? How would the peace-makers and peace-keepers be trained?

Doctors Without Borders brings not just medicine but also moral succor, or at least visibility, to oppressed communities around the world. Great, but why stop there? Already there are Students Without Borders, linking students around the world to promote travel, cross-cultural understanding, and academic freedom. Now how about, say, Electricians Without Borders, or Librarians Without Borders, or Musicians Without Borders, or Democrats Without Borders, or, who knows, even Ethical Philosophers Without Borders? Election Monitors Without Borders? (Notice that this is actually already happening: think of the post-Presidential career of Jimmy Carter). Likewise—Elders Without Borders? Imagineers Without Borders?

14.4 VISION BEYOND RACISM

In Reading 12, Ta-Nehisi Coates explicitly raises the question of moral vision in response to racism.

What should be our aim beyond meager survival of constant, generational, ongoing battery and assault? I have asked this question all my life. I have sought the answer through my reading and writings, through the music of my youth, through arguments with your grandfather, with your mother. I have searched for answers in nationalist myth, in classrooms, out on the streets, and on other continents. The question is unanswerable, which is not to say futile. The greatest reward of this constant interrogation, of confrontation with the brutality of my country, is that it has freed me from ghosts and myths.

“The question is unanswerable”; certainly he doesn’t answer it. Is that the end of it, then? Maybe a better question is: How far can we go toward an answer? Can we *start*, at least? And who is “we” in this case? Specifically what are white people able to do with moral vision in the case of racism? Black people?

These are extremely difficult and painful questions. Approach them cautiously in your own heart and in dialogue with others. Don’t assume the answers are obvious or even achievable now. Yet still, again and in the end, ethics challenges us to keep moving forward. So what is the next step?

NOTES

Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech is widely available on the Internet and in historical collections. On the end of the speech as an inspired improvisation, see <http://www.4uth.gov.ua/usa/english/facts/democrac/38.htm>.

Time’s “Owl Versus Man” cover appeared on June 25, 1990. A thorough study concluding that environmentalism and economic welfare are not at odds—that, in fact, they go together—is Stephen Meyer, *Environmentalism and Economic Prosperity* (MIT Project on Environmental Politics and Policy, 1992).

For a quick introduction to his thinking from Bill Thomas himself, you can watch his TED talk at <http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/TEDxSF-Bill-Thomas-Elderhood-Ri>. For more on the many worlds of Ursula K. LeGuin, see her website at http://www.ursulakleaguin.com/UKL_info.html.

By way of training the more radical side of the imagination, try my brief handbook, *How to Re-Imagine the World* (New Society Publishers, 2007), from which I borrow at the end of Exercise 15.3. On environmental visions, including some well off the usual scales, try my *Mobilizing the Green Imagination: An Exuberant Manifesto* (New Society Publishers, 2012) and Thomas Berry’s *The Dream of the Earth* (Sierra Club Books, 2006).



GOING FARTHER #16

ETHICS AND SUSTAINABILITY

Ethics may seem remote from questions about how buildings are constructed, the kinds of materials that go into everyday products, or how the industrial system functions as a whole. Yet for architect William McDonough, design questions are crucially ethical—and ethics now requires an entirely new approach to design across the board. Vision is a radical thing! But also, here as elsewhere, profoundly intriguing and powerfully appealing.

READING 34

“Design for a New World”

WILLIAM McDONOUGH

WILLIAM McDONOUGH is an influential architect and designer, and author, along with Michael Braungart, of the well-known book *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking How We Make Things* (North Point Press, 2002) and the more recent *The Upcycle: Beyond Sustainability—Designing for Abundance* (North Point Press, 2013). He is a frequent panelist and speaker around the world, and winner of the Presidential Award for Sustainable Development (1996), the National Design Award (2004), and the Presidential Green Chemistry Challenge Award (2003). *Time* magazine recognized him as a “Hero for the Planet” in 1999, stating that “his utopianism is grounded in a unified philosophy that—in demonstrable and practical ways—is changing the design of the world.”

One of the great leaders of the United States, Thomas Jefferson, saw himself primarily as a designer. This is evident from his tombstone, which he designed, and on which we can read three things: “*Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of American Independence, author of the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom, and Father of the University of Virginia.*” These were the three things

William McDonough, “Design for a New World”.

Jefferson thought were worth mentioning on his tombstone. He did not record his various activities—that he had been President of the United States, minister to France, an architect. He recorded only what he had left behind for future generations: his creative legacy to the world, his lasting contributions to prosperity. Consider looking at the world as a series of design assignments. How would we present the design assignment of the Declaration of Independence? Perhaps it could be framed like this: please prepare a document that provides us with the concept of “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness free from remote tyranny.” That would be the retroactive design assignment of the Declaration of Independence.

In Mr. Jefferson’s case, “remote tyranny” referred to the King of England, George III: someone who ruled from a distant place, who was not sensitive to local needs and circumstance. Now, seven generations later, I believe we need to look at the concept of many Declarations of Interdependence, because we realize that some of the remote tyranny future generations will suffer—is us. Right now, we—as a culture—are imposing what I call intergenerational remote tyranny. I would like to focus on this tyrannizing effect from a design perspective and consider how we can design it out.

Thomas Jefferson clearly understood the idea of intergenerational remote tyranny. In 1789, he wrote a letter to James Madison, which I paraphrase here:

The earth belongs to the living. No man may by natural right oblige the lands he owns or occupies to debts greater than those that may be paid during his own lifetime. Because if he could, then the world would belong to the dead and not to the living.

In *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson stated that the founding fathers who wrote the Bill of Rights—despite their intellectual gifts and foresight—could not have imagined that corporations, governments, and individuals would poison children downstream. They did not protect us from this kind of tyranny in the Bill of Rights because they could not even conceive of such a problem. We have to remember that Jefferson and Madison were living in a world that was effectively solar-powered. Their homes, the original grounds of the University of Virginia, were built with local materials: local clay, local fuel sources, solar-driven fuel sources. These people inhabited a world of natural energy flows. At that time, you could look out to the West and see a vast expanse of natural resources. Petrochemicals had not yet been invented. Yet Jefferson’s phrase “The earth belongs to the living” is a powerful commentary on the tyrannies we are now seeing due to poor design. . . .

Jefferson's design legacy still provides for us, his seventh generation, and it continues to offer profound benefits even as the world changes around us. To see the legacy he brought to the Bill of Rights more clearly, we have to consider what it promulgated over time and imagine what it might promulgate in the future.

Jefferson wrote, "No man may by natural right..." "Natural rights" had become a fundamental concept for Jefferson, and he expanded on it often. In *The Rights of Nature*, Roderick Nash pointed out that the concept of rights has been expanding since the Magna Carta gave rights to white noble English males in 1215. In 1776, the Declaration of Independence gave rights to white American land-owning males. In 1864, we had the Emancipation Proclamation. In 1922, female suffrage. In 1964, the Civil Rights Voting Act. And then, in 1973, the Endangered Species Act: the first time in our history that human beings took responsibility for giving other living species the right to exist. We acknowledged the rights of nature itself. From our perspective, "natural rights" has now expanded to include the rights of nature itself.

If we project this pattern out, it is clear that our next discourse must be about endangered ecosystems, because we are finally realizing our interdependent connection to the natural world, and it won't be enough that there's a snail here or a condor there. We now understand that we are all connected to the web of life. Our understanding of rights and responsibilities must expand to include the rights and responsibilities of all living things...

We used to be able to throw things away. Remember that? Things went "away." Where is "away" now? "Away" is here. "Away" is someone's backyard. There is no place to go from here. We now see that we inhabit a smaller and smaller planet. "Away" has become very close indeed.

In this context, we must again ask ourselves, "What is natural?" and, "What are our intentions as evidenced by our designs?" Early in the 1830s, Ralph Waldo Emerson went to Europe on a sailboat and returned on a steamship. Let me abstract this for effect: He went over on a solar-powered recyclable craft operated by craftpersons practicing ancient arts in the open air. He returned in a steel rust bucket putting oil on the water and smoke in the sky, operated by people working in the dark shoveling fossil fuels into the mouths of boilers. We are still designing steamships. Most buildings we design are essentially steamships. On any given day, the sun is shining and we're inside with the lights on causing the production of nuclear isotopes, carbon dioxide, nitrous oxides, and sulfur dioxide. Every time you find yourself in a building illuminated by electric light when the sun is shining,

you should think, “I am in a steamship. I am in the dark.” We need a new design. . . .

I would like to posit the design principles for the Next Industrial Revolution, and I would also like to describe a new design assignment. But first, let me describe the retroactive design assignment of the First Industrial Revolution: Would you design a system of production and a system of commerce that

- produces billions of pounds of highly toxic hazardous material and puts them in your soil, your air, and your water every year?
- measures prosperity by how much of your natural capital you can dig up, burn, deplete, throw into holes in the ground and into the rivers and otherwise destroy?
- measures productivity by how few people are working?
- measures progress by how many smokestacks you have?
- requires thousands of complex regulations to keep you from killing each other too quickly?
- produces a few things so highly dangerous and toxic they will require future generations to maintain constant vigilance while living in terror?

That is the retroactive design assignment of the First Industrial Revolution. Is this an ethical assignment? . . . We have now reached the point where we can agree that this is not a design assignment we wish to accept in our time, and it is certainly not one we want to pass on to our children. It is time to look again at the horizon with delight and anticipation, with a new responsibility and a new design legacy in mind.

Let’s design a system for what I call the Next Industrial Revolution that

- introduces no hazardous material into the soil, the air, and the water every year
- measures prosperity by how much natural capital and how much solar income we can accrue in productive and fecund ways
- measures productivity by how many people are being gainfully and meaningfully employed
- measures progress by how many buildings have no smokestacks, no dangerous effluents, and no pipes
- does not require regulations to stop us from killing one another too quickly
- produces nothing that will require future generations to maintain vigilance and live in terror . . .

I have developed some principles that we use in our work:

1) *Waste Equals Food*. In nature, there is no such thing as waste, so the first thing we must do is eliminate the concept of waste. I am not saying we need to minimize waste; I am saying we need to eliminate the entire concept of waste....

We talk about recycling, but most of us don't recycle in the full sense of the word; we often do what Michael Braungart and I call "downcycling"—we reduce the quality of a material until its value is practically nonexistent. In other words, we slow its journey to the landfill. For example, when a high-quality plastic like PET is "recycled" it may be mixed with other plastics to produce a hybrid of much lower quality, which is then used to make park benches. The original elevated quality can never be retrieved. So what we call recycling is still working with a *Cradle-to-Grave* life cycle.

Michael Braungart points out that the *Cradle-to-Grave* mentality is definitely Northern European. In Sweden, if you throw a banana peel on the ground it is going to be there a long time, because nothing rots quickly. Northern Europeans tended to bury everything. Western culture, then, tends to bury unwanted things. Consequently, our culture developed products in terms of a *Cradle-to-Grave* life cycle concept; once you finish with something you bury it because you don't want to look at it. In the abstract, one might say it's too bad the First Industrial Revolution didn't begin in a place like Mali. As Dr. Braungart notes, if you go to "primitive" places today, you might see a lot of aluminum cans lying on the ground outside a fence and think the people there are inconsiderate and slovenly. But those people once drank out of clay cups or gourds, and when they finished, they would simply toss the vessel over the fence and the goats, ants, or beetles would take it away. Its organic materials would nourish other organisms and go back to the soil. So these people are still doing what they've been doing forever; modern production just hasn't provided them with an intelligent design for a container that turns back into dirt....

Plastic bottles could easily be redesigned so that they don't contain questionable substances and could safely replenish the soil. Right now they may contain antimony, catalytic residues, UV stabilizers, plasticizers, and antioxidants. What happens when the people in Mali throw that over the fence? Why not design a bottle so that when you finish with it you toss it into the compost or it biodegrades by the roadside, or it can be used as fuel for needy people to cook with? It should be safe fuel. If a clothing manufacturer wants to make clothing out of it, it should not contain potentially toxic substances. Plastic bottles were not originally designed

to become clothing; they were designed to hold liquids. We have a fundamental design problem. We need to design things so they go into the biological or the technical cycle, safely, *Cradle-to-Cradle*.

2) *Use Current Solar Income*. Nature does not mine the past; it does not borrow from the future. It operates on current income. Most of us can't pursue our professional lives working out of capital reserves. We have to work with current income, and so should our designs.

I think we're going to resolve the energy problem, because we have current solar income. Energy from the sun is the only income the planet has (except for meteorites); all our other materials are already here. If you're in business, you understand that you must work from current income, not savings. Because we have that income from the sun, I think it won't be long before we find elegant solutions to the energy situation.

The University of Virginia's School of Architecture is about to build a building addition project designed to be a net energy exporter, a structure that produces more energy than it consumes. Why would we want to make a building that produces more energy than it needs? The reason is that *sustainability* may just be a shibboleth—the magic word that lets us into the temple of hope. A lot of people use the term *sustainability* as if it's going to save us. But sustainability as it's presently defined may be only the edge between destruction and restoration. Why would we want to simply sustain where we are now? We're in a depletive mode. We need to actually design things that are restorative. Think about the high-tech designs you see around you: airplanes, computers, space age stores. Imagine how much farther we can go, how wonderfully ambitious we can really be.

What is one of the best designs we know of for inspiration? How about a tree? How about a design that can accrue solar income, is fecund, produces habitat for all sorts of living things including people, provides fuel, food, and micro-climate, distills and transpires water, sequesters carbon, and makes oxygen? How many things do you know that do that? How many things have humans designed that make oxygen?

Why not make a building that produces oxygen? Why not make a building that produces energy? We're not very bright or ambitious designers if we can't even emulate a tree, which nature has put right there in front of us as an obvious model. Just compare a tree to most rooms. Right now, I'm in a room that sucks electrical energy from a grid, I'm responsible for the production of nuclear isotopes simply by turning on a light switch, and I'm

probably breathing all sorts of chemical experiments I don't even realize I am undertaking. Compared to a tree, this is obviously primitive design. If I'm going to be a sophisticated designer, I had better start thinking more about trees—about buildings that produce more energy than they need and purify their water, and I had better start thinking about designing buildings and sites that absorb water quickly and release it slowly in a pure form like healthy soil. A building could be a restorative thing, a thing that is more fecund than destructive....

Let's get creative and start redesigning a new kind of prosperity for ourselves, but let's make sure this prosperity includes everyone else, including our seventh generation to come. Design for all of our prosperity, not just your own prosperity. We can start by eliminating our destruction masquerading as consumption, and begin to enjoy the search for our rightful and responsible place in the natural world. Get prosperous. Get very prosperous, because then people will want to imitate you. But honor that thing in yourself, that creativity in your spirit and your place that is really the sacred trust for all generations. We need to design a system of production and consumption and a system of commerce that will allow everyone life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in their own place, free from remote tyranny—the remote tyranny that is us and our bad design.

RESOURCES



EIGHT MAXIMS FOR MAKING A DIFFERENCE

In studying this book I hope you have deepened your understanding of the resources of ethics: historical, conceptual, and practical skills to make a constructive difference, in both word and deed, in problematic ethical situations. We have concentrated on building and grounding the necessary skills and making our ethical inheritance supple and energizing, rather than the hoary and rigid set of rules that so many people still seem to expect—not without reason. This book’s main aim has been to bring ethics into view as a *live* and powerful thing.

Still, one of the chief points of ethics is to make a real difference in the world. Even many ethics courses in colleges and universities today include some kind of engagement or community service work in larger communities. This text therefore concludes with a guide to ethical activism. It is not another chapter, though, but is intentionally set off as a resource, a guide to taking ethics out into the larger world. There is more exhortation and urgency in its voice than in the text proper. As you might expect after the last several chapters, the aim may also be more ambitious than the usual kinds of service, important as service is as well. Serve, by all means—but consider more transformative possible forms of engagement too.

This guide is also cross-cut and supported by stories, many about (and some by) young people, like most of the users of this text. Each of its “maxims”—short exhortations or “rules”—is practical and to the point. It should be inspiring, I hope, just to see ourselves as capable ethical change-makers, potentially even on a large scale. Seriously—get out there and change the world!



You Can Do It

The question is not “Can you make a difference?”
You already *do* make a difference. It’s just a matter
of what kind of difference you want to make.

—Julia Butterfly Hill

Whatever we do in this life, as Hill points out, we are already making some kind of difference. Just to take a breath makes a difference to the air around us. To drive somewhere; to eat; to eat this rather than that or to eat at all; to go to school; to study this subject rather than that; to vote or not to vote—all of these actions, and ten thousand others like them, make the world different, in some way, than it otherwise would have been. Every act or non-act makes some kind of difference to other people, to our various communities, to the other creatures and Earth.

So far from it being hard to make a difference, then, it is hard—in fact, it is impossible—*not* to make a difference. And thus, just as Hill says, the only question is what kind of difference we will make. What *will* we eat or drive or vote for? What ongoing great work could we give our energies to—or not?

Everywhere you look, there are things to do and people leading the way. Right in my community, there are artists who use “Art Walks” to revitalize their neighborhoods, both economically and personally. I know specialists in socially responsible investments, schoolteachers who spend their own money to buy poor students textbooks or haul them off on trips when neither school nor parents can pay, and the creators of a new organization to promote long-term adaptive thinking about climate change. At the university where I teach, colleagues are helping to rebuild disaster-stricken areas, some quite nearby, while also taking students next door or abroad over breaks to build homes with Habitat for Humanity. They advise and staff local social services and health organizations and prison ministries. Students organize to bring locally grown and organic food into the university cafeterias, supporting local growers and introducing fellow students to totally new ways to eat.

Small acts can lead to very big things. This is true even for people who eventually ended up winning what is surely one of the world's top prizes for ethics: the Nobel Peace Prize. Kenyan Wangari Maathai, for example, became world-renowned for promoting sustainable economic and cultural development in Kenya and throughout Africa, founding the "Green Belt Movement" that mobilized tens of thousands of poor women to plant more than thirty million trees—and for this she was also intensely politically active, as well as actively persecuted, for decades. Yet she started by just planting a few trees in her backyard. Similarly, Lech Walesa, a Polish dockworker who catalyzed the Solidarity movement in Poland under the last years of Communism and eventually became Poland's president, was just a shipyard worker, a common electrician. Fired for organizing a memorial to some assassinated workers, he scaled a wall to rejoin the next strike . . . and one thing led to the next.

Yet again, Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan, cofounders of the Northern Ireland Peace Movement, met when an Irish Republican Army getaway car was hit by gunfire and veered out of control, killing three children. Corrigan, a Catholic, was the children's aunt; Williams, also Catholic with Protestant and Jewish roots, just happened to be walking by. One a secretary, the other a receptionist; both ordinary mothers with small children themselves. Two days later, they led ten thousand Protestant and Catholic women, marching together, at the dead children's funeral. That march was disrupted by Catholic hardliners for being "dupes of the British." So they held another, and this time thirty-five thousand people came. A peace movement was born.

All of these Nobel Peace Prize winners were, in their own views, just ordinary people who simply stepped up to what their moments asked of them. And so, what about us—you and me? We may not be witnesses to a history-changing event, or arrive on the scene just as some new ethical need opens up that we might fill. Then again, we might. Or maybe we already *have*, but need to develop the ability to see it as such. In any case, in whatever situation we find ourselves, there are things to do. Actually, I am sure that nearly every reader of this book has taken part in some kind of ethical work like that just outlined, or at least knows someone who is doing it, right here and now. Making an ethical difference is not just for some distant people you might admire in the history books or read about in the paper. It is for all of us.

READING 35

"Living Ideals"

DANUSHA GOSKA

DANUSHA GOSKA is a writer and teacher whose work has appeared in national publications like *Sojourners* and *The Sun*, in

scholarly journals such as *The Journal of Popular Culture*, Polin, and *New York Folklore*, and on websites such as Common-dreams.org, TheScreamOnline.com, and Beliefnet.

It was September 1998, in Bloomington, Indiana. As part of the conference on Spirituality and Ecology: No Separation, a group of concerned citizens was gathered in the basement of St. Paul Catholic Center. They were thinking and talking about living their ideals. Some had planted trees in Africa. Some described ways that they honor the indigenous spirit of a place, and their own ancestors. Elderly nuns and young feminists recounted their part in women's struggle. One frustrated woman voiced the nagging worry of many. "I want to do something, but what can I do? I'm just one person, an average person. I can't have an impact. I live with the despair of my own powerlessness. I can't bring myself to do anything. The world is so screwed up, and I have so little power. I feel so *paralyzed*."

I practically exploded.

Years before I had been stricken by a debilitating illness. Perilymph fistula's symptoms are like those of multiple sclerosis. On some days I was functional. On others, and I could never predict when these days would strike, I was literally, not metaphorically, paralyzed. I couldn't leave the house; I could barely stand up. I had moved to Bloomington for grad school. I knew no one in town. I couldn't get health care because I hadn't enough money, and the Social Security administration, against the advice of its own physician and vocational advisors, denied my claim.

That's why I imitated Mount Vesuvius when the conference participant claimed that just one person, one average person, can't do anything significant to make the world a better place; that the only logical option was passivity, surrender, and despair.

I raised my hand and spoke. "I have an illness that causes intermittent bouts of paralysis," I explained. "And that paralysis has taught me something. It has taught me that my protestations of my own powerlessness are bogus. Yes, some days I can't move or see. But you know what? Some days I can move. Some days I can see. And the difference between being able to walk across the room and not being able to walk across the room is epic.

"I commute to campus by foot along a railroad track. In spring, I come across turtles who have gotten stuck. The track is littered with the hollowing shells of turtles that couldn't escape the rails. So, I bend over and I pick up the still living trapped turtles that I do find. I carry them to a wooded area and let them go. For those turtles, that much power that I have is enough.

"I'm just like those turtles. When I have been sick and house-bound for days, I wish someone—anyone—would talk to me. To hear a human voice say my name; to be touched: that would mean the world to me.

"One day an attack hit me while I was walking home from campus. It was a snowy day. There was snow on the ground, and more snow was falling from the sky. I struggled with each step; wobbled and wove across the road. I must have looked like a drunk. One of my neighbors, whom I had never met, stopped and asked if I was okay. He drove me home.

"He didn't hand me the thousands of dollars I needed for surgery. He didn't take me in and empty my puke bucket. He just gave me one ride, one day. I am still grateful to him and touched by his gesture.

"I'd lived in the neighborhood for years, and so far he has been the only one to stop. The problem is not that we have so little power. The problem is that we don't use the power that we have."

Why do we deny that power? Why do we not honor what we can do?

Part of the reason is that "virtue" is often defined as the ultimate commodity, something exclusive, like a Porsche or a perfect figure, that only the rich and famous have access to. "Virtue" is defined as so outside of normal human experience or ability that you'd think, if you were doing it right, you'd know; because camera crews and an awards committee would appear on your lawn.

Thus the defining of virtue is surrendered to a Madison Avenue mentality. I remember when the Dalai Lama came to Bloomington in 1999. The words "virtue" and "celebrity" were confused until they became synonymous. The Dalai Lama's visit was the most glamorous event Bloomington had seen in years. Suddenly even our barbershop scuttlebutt featured more movie stars than an article from *People* magazine. "Did you see Steven Segal on Kirkwood Avenue? Richard Gere gets in tomorrow." Virtue becomes something farther and farther out of the reach of the common person.

I was once a Peace Corps volunteer. I also volunteered for the Sisters of Charity, the order begun by Mother Teresa. When people learn of these things, they sometimes act impressed. I am understood to be a virtuous person.

I did go far away, and I did wear a foreign costume. But I don't know that I was virtuous. I tried to be, but I was an immature, inadequately trained girl in foreign countries with obscenely unjust regimes and little to no avenues for progress. My impact was limited.

To put myself through college, I worked as a nurse's aid. I earned minimum wage. I wore a pink polyester uniform and I dealt with the elderly and the dying, ignored people who went years without seeing a loved one, who died alone. When I speak of this job, I never impress anyone. I am not understood to be a virtuous person. Rather, I am understood to be working class.

I loved this difficult, low-paid work not out of any masochistic sense of personal elevation through suffering. I loved it because I physically and emotionally touched people every day, all day long; I made them comfortable; I made them laugh; I challenged them; they rose to meet the challenges. In return, patients shared with me the most precious commodity in the universes: their humanity.

I go to a food bank every two weeks to get my food. I have no car. I can't carry two weeks worth of food the three miles back to my house. Every week, I get a ride home from other food bank patrons. These folks don't pause for a second to sigh, "Oh, problems are so big, I'm so powerless; will it really help anything if I give you this ride?" They don't look around to make sure someone is watching. They just, invisibly, do the right thing. I get rides in old, old cars. In one car I could see the road beneath whiz past under broken-down flooring; in another, I shared space with a large, lapping dog. I once got a ride from a man who told me he'd just gotten out of jail. Another time, my chauffeur's tattoos ran up and down his naked chest and back. When I was sick, I went from agency to agency, begging people with glamorous titles and impressive virtue résumés for help. Most did nothing.

The *Lamed Vov Tzaddikim* are the thirty-six hidden saints of Jewish folklore. Unlettered and insignificant, they work at humble trades and pass unnoticed. Because of these anonymous saints, the world continues to exist. Without their insignificant, unnoticed virtue—Poof!—God loses divine patience, and the world goes up in smoke.

Sometimes we convince ourselves that the "unnoticed" gestures of "insignificant" people mean nothing. It's not enough to recycle our soda cans; we must Stop Global Warming Now. Since we can't Stop Global Warming Now, we may as well not recycle our soda cans. It's not enough to be our best selves; we have to be Gandhi. And yet when we study the biographies of our heroes, we learn that they spent years in preparation doing tiny, decent things before one historical moment propelled them to center stage.

Moments, as if animate, use the prepared to tilt empires. Ironically, saints we worship today, heroes we admire, were often ridiculed, tortured, or, most punishingly, ignored in their own lifetimes. St. John of the Cross gave the world the spiritual classic, *The Dark Night of the Soul*. It was inspired by his own experience of being imprisoned by the members of his own religious order. Before Solidarity, Lech Walesa, the Nobel Peace Prize winner who helped bring down communism, was a nonentity; a blue-collar worker in an oft-ridiculed Eastern European backwater. He was always active; one moment changed this small man's otherwise small-time, invisible activism into the kind of wedge that can topple a giant. Now, that moment past, Walesa has returned to relative obscurity.

While working or traveling in Africa, Asia, and Eastern Europe, I occasionally met people who really did have next to nothing, but who stunned me with their insistence on the abundance of their own humanity. One afternoon, as I trekked to my teaching post in the Himalayas, a monsoon storm turned day into night and a landslide wiped out my trail. I got terribly lost; coming to a strange village, exhausted, I sat on the porch of a peasant home. Inside, the family was eating roasted cow-corn kernels for dinner. Roasted cow-corn kernels were to be their entire dinner; there was nothing else on their menu.

A man inside saw that a human form was sitting on his porch. He couldn't have seen that I was American, or anything else for that matter. It was dark night by then, in a village without electricity. In any case, I was wearing a sari. He whispered to his wife, "Someone is sitting on our porch. We have to cook rice." Rice is the highest status food in that economy. And, by "rice," they meant, for them, an elaborate meal consisting of rice, lentils, and vegetables.

This feeling of being seen, this conviction that every act one performs matters to a supremely consequential audience, can come from a belief in God. Psalm 139 articulates how thoroughly and consequentially *witnessed* the theist feels.

O Lord, You have searched me
and You know me.
... Before a word is on my tongue
You know it completely, O Lord.
Where can I go from Your Spirit?
Where can I flee from Your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, You are there;
If I make my bed in the depths, You are there.

The very marrow of the believer's bones is impregnated with the conviction that everything he does is avidly witnessed by God,

and that everything he does matters to God. Whether or not one's fellow incarnate beings see is secondary.

Non-theists, including atheists, can also have this feeling that one is witnessed, that everything one does matters. Not just a personalized God sees and tallies human action. Disembodied forces that can never be tampered with also weigh our deeds. For some, karma plays witness. You may be able to fool your fellow humans, but, ultimately, you can't cheat karma.

In many cultures, there is a disembodied force that demands that every action be ethical: honor. "*Bog, Honor, Ojczyzna*" or "God, Honor, Country," is the Polish national motto. My stays in Poland introduced me to otherwise empty-handed activists who faced off against Nazis, Communists, and now, capitalism, with relentless personal power. "Burnout" and "apathy" were not in their vocabulary. Even when serving time in prisons that appeared on no map, they felt visible. Honor recorded their every deed, and ensured that it mattered.

I suspect that we all have our three-in-the-morning moments, when all of life seems one no-exit film noir, where any effort is pointless, where any hope seems to be born only to be dashed, like a fallen nestling on a summer sidewalk. When I have those moments, if I do nothing else, I remind myself: the ride in the snow; the volunteers at the food bank; the Nepali peasants who fed me. Activists like the Pole Wladyslaw Bartoszewski who, decades before he would earn any fame, got out of Auschwitz only to go on to even more resistance against the Nazis, and then the Soviets. Invisible, silent people who, day by day, choice by choice, unseen by me, unknown to me, force me to witness myself, invite me to keep making my own best choices, and keep me living my ideals.

RESPONSE-ABILITY

You'll remember from chapter 7 that philosopher John Sullivan speaks of *response-ability*: the ability to choose our responses to things, or, more specifically, the capacity to observe or own habits of responsiveness and then to re-think them and change them as necessary. Recognizing our response-ability in this sense is also crucial to making a difference. We can first of all make a difference to ourselves—and then to the larger world.

Sullivan points out that response-ability must be cultivated. It is not necessarily a natural thing. Too many forces push the other way. People are often afraid to step even a quarter inch out of line, even when no one else would notice. Unhelpful habits can be immensely restricting too. We try to force ourselves into impossible body types or take up habits we know are self-destructive, because, well, others around us are doing so. TV ad campaigns create overnight fads, and ads in general fuel the persistent craving for more stuff. Two years later we wonder what got into us. The same is sometimes true for political passions, going to war, seizing on a career, even getting married. Experiments even suggest that people will readily accept a completely mad system just because someone in authority expects it of them (Google “Milgram experiment” if you haven’t heard of it already). Sometimes we are very far from freedom.

Cultivating Response-Ability

So how do we make our thoughts—our selves—a little more our own, and therefore also make our acts more self-possessed and free?

Of course it is partly a matter of willpower, of determination, even of a kind of courage. Commitment and persistence are essential. We have to be willing to take on self-possession as a project, stop automatically “going along,” and sometimes take a harder path.

But will by itself is not enough. In fact, it’s hardly even a start. What we really need are methods, strategies: ways of creating an alternative momentum for ourselves. Some of these methods may seem obvious—some *are* obvious, but need to be pointed out anyway—while others may surprise you.

First: Give yourself some space to think. Literally. Regularly seek out quiet places to be safe and alone, and set aside time that is not rushed or distracted. It is for good reason that the world’s religious traditions recommend the practice of spiritual retreat. Give yourself regular chances to catch your breath, to get a little distance, to take stock of things on your own terms.

Second: Rearrange your inputs. Carefully list the pressures that tend to pull you in the way you really want to go, and then consider how you might rearrange your life so that more of these pressures are present, and/or fewer counter-pressures.

This is obvious in a way, but we also so regularly overstress sheer willpower (and therefore seriously over-stress it as well, so to say) that we miss the need to change our life-patterns too. To use your school time productively, hang around productive places like libraries and studios and gyms. If you want to reduce your alcohol use, don’t spend your time in bars or with drinkers. Find yourself attractive alternative activities and friends. In general, don’t set up your life so you constantly have to battle temptations and swim against the current. In all seriousness: find yourself a different river!

Likewise, avoid manipulators. For example, you may decide to rearrange your exposure to the incessant and insistent voice of the commercial media, and ads or films that are using ever more extreme imagery to catch our attention. Surround yourself instead—immerse yourself in—depictions of the world you *want* to be living in.

Keep at it. You will not free your mind overnight. Also, take manageable steps. This may mean starting small. It may take time to find your moral voice and the courage of your convictions. One thing will lead to the next. Get in the habit of going your own way about small but important things to you—avoiding sexist or racist humor might be one good place to start—so that when bigger things come along, you have had some practice. You may also find, once you step out on your own in any way, that people will begin to look to you for leadership. Again, as maxim 1 insists, even small things make a difference.

Get informed. Identify the facts and resources you will need, and go find them. I have seen many students decide to go meat-free, for instance, with the best of intentions and goodwill, only to discover after a month that they cannot, so to speak, live on bread alone. Of course not! Yet an informed vegetarian diet can be easy and extremely healthy, and fellow vegetarians (and cookbooks, grocery stores, restaurants, clubs, etc.) can now be found nearly everywhere. Whatever the moves you have in mind—do your research.

Remember your critical thinking skills. The point is not to embrace some new dogma and thereafter define yourself by it. Ultimately that isn't response-able either: you make yourself unable to respond in any way but one. Thinking more deeply means recognizing complexity and ambiguity and the changing face of many issues. Expect—indeed, invite and celebrate—growth and change.



There Are Many Ways

There are many ways to make ethical change—probably as many ways as there are different individuals and circumstances.

ARGUMENTS

The way that comes to mind first, probably, is making moral arguments, in one-on-one conversations or debates or writing or speaking to groups of people. We've explored some of the resources for doing so in the chapters of this book, including the major families of moral values in Part II, which typically provide the terms and conceptual frameworks for such arguments. So use them! Articulate the deeper values at stake; make the connections. This is, in part, how contemporary advocates make moral cases about same-sex marriage, for example, and vegetarianism, medical (and non-medical) marijuana, assisted suicide, and many other moral causes. It is careful, perceptive, necessary work.

DEEDS

But there are other and very different ways to make a moral difference as well. For example, in the right time and place, individual *deeds* may have powerful moral reverberations. Rosa Parks, famously, simply refused to leave her seat in the front of that Montgomery city bus and move to the black section in back. At the wrong time and place, her act could have had very bad consequences for her, or maybe no consequences at all. As it happened, her one act sparked a bus boycott that ended by bringing down legal segregation in the entire American South.

Or again: you've seen the famous photo of the unknown young man in China's Tiananmen Square, during the mass protests of the summer of 1989, holding off a line of tanks simply by standing in front of them. Those tanks could have crushed him in seconds. But he had—and used—a

moral power rooted precisely in his extreme vulnerability. And he didn't stop there, either. Apparently he also yelled at them, "Why are you here? You have caused nothing but misery!" and later climbed up onto the turret of the lead tank to speak to the soldiers—young people, after all, like himself—inside. *Time* subsequently named that anonymous young tank-stopper one of the one hundred most influential people of the entire 20th century.

So: What deeds—even small echoes of these—might your time and place call for?

READING 36

From *On the Rez*

IAN FRAZIER

IAN FRAZIER'S *ON THE REZ* chronicles the modern life of the Plains Indians, especially the Oglala Sioux. This excerpt describes a deed of SuAnne Big Crow, the most admired Oglala basketball player of all time, which Frazier calls "one of the coolest and bravest deeds I have ever heard of." From its lasting effects, we can also see that her deed made a profound moral change in a completely unexpected and seemingly even impossible way.

The setting is a racially charged 1988 high school basketball game in Lead, South Dakota, where SuAnne's team from the Pine Ridge reservation are the visitors. The host gym, as often happens, "is dense with hostility..."

SuAnne was a full member of the team by then. She was a freshman, fourteen years old. Getting ready in the locker room, the Pine Ridge girls could hear the din from the fans. They were yelling fake-Indian war cries, a "woo-woo-woo" sound. The usual plan for the pre-game warm-up was for the visiting team to run onto the court in a line, take a lap or two around the floor, shoot some baskets, and then go to their bench at courtside. After that, the home team would come out and do the same, and then the game would begin. Usually the Thorpes lined up for their entry more or less according to height, which meant that senior Doni De Cory, one of the tallest, went first. As the team waited in the hallway leading

From Ian Frazier, *On the Rez* (Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2000), pp. 208–213. Used by permission of Farrar, Straus, and Giroux.

from the locker room, the heckling got louder. The Lead fans were yelling epithets like “squaw” and “gut-eater.” Some were waving food stamps, a reference to the reservation’s receiving federal aid. Others yelled, “Where’s the cheese?”—the joke being that if Indians were lining up, it must be to get commodity cheese. The Lead high school band had joined in, with fake-Indian drumming and a fake-Indian tune. Doni De Cory looked out the door and told her teammates. “I can’t handle this.” SuAnne quickly offered to go first in her place. She was so eager that Doni became suspicious. “Don’t embarrass us,” Doni told her. SuAnne said “I won’t. I won’t embarrass you.” Doni gave her the ball, and SuAnne stood first in line.

She came running onto the court dribbling the basketball, with her teammates running behind. On the court, the noise was deafeningly loud. SuAnne went right down the middle; but instead of running a full lap, she suddenly stopped when she got to center court. Her teammates were taken by surprise, and some bumped into one another. Coach Zimiga at the rear of the line did not know why they had stopped. SuAnne turned to Doni De Cory and tossed her the ball. Then she stepped into the jump-ball circle at center court, in front of the Lead fans. She unbuttoned her warm-up jacket, took it off, draped it over her shoulders, and began to do the Lakota shawl dance. SuAnne knew all the traditional dances—she had competed in many powwows as a little girl—and the dance she chose is a young woman’s dance, graceful and modest and show-offy all at the same time. “I couldn’t believe it—she was powwowin’, like, ‘get down!’” Doni De Cory recalled. “And then she started to sing.” SuAnne began to sing in Lakota, swaying back and forth in the jump-ball circle, doing the shawl dance, using her warm-up jacket for a shawl. The crowd went completely silent. “All that stuff the Lead fans were yelling—it was like she *reversed* it somehow,” a teammate said. In the sudden quiet, all you could hear was her Lakota song. SuAnne stood up, dropped her jacket, took the ball from Doni De Cory, and ran a lap around the court dribbling expertly and fast. The fans began to cheer and applaud. She sprinted to the basket, went up in the air, and laid the ball through the hoop, with the fans cheering loudly now. Of course, Pine Ridge went on to win the game.

[Frazier inserts here a short history of Lead. The name, it turns out, refers not to lead, the metal, but rather to the miners’ term for a gold-bearing deposit, in this case what became a \$10 billion gold mine in land that was dispossessed from the Sioux in the midst of the Indian wars of the 1870s. It took a hundred years for the U.S. Supreme Court to affirm the Sioux (Lakota) people’s right to at least minimal

compensation for the theft of their land—a tiny fraction of what the land yielded in gold, which now sits in a bank account unused, because the Sioux no longer want minimal compensation for the land but want back at least some small portion of the actual land itself. Everyone on the reservation, and in Lead, knows this story. —AW]

Inescapably, this history is present when an Oglala team goes to Lead to play a basketball game. It may even explain why the fans in Lead were so mean: fear that you might perhaps be in the wrong can make you ornerier sometimes. In all the accounts of this land grab and its aftermath, and among the many greedy and driven men who had a part, I cannot find evidence of a single act as elegant, as generous, or as transcendent as SuAnne's dance at center court in the gym at Lead.

For the Oglala, what SuAnne did that day almost immediately took on the stature of myth. People from Pine Ridge who witnessed it still describe it in terms of awe and disbelief. Amazement swept through the younger kids when they heard. "I was, like, 'What did she just do?'" recalled her cousin Angie Big Crow, an eighth-grader at the time. All over the reservation, people told and retold the story of SuAnne at Lead. Any time the subject of SuAnne came up when I was talking to people on Pine Ridge, I would always ask if they had heard about what she did at Lead, and always the answer was a smile and a nod—"Yeah, I was there," or "Yeah, I heard about that." To the unnumbered big and small slights of local racism which the Oglala have known all their lives, SuAnne's exploit made an emphatic reply.

Back in the days when Lakota war parties still fought battles against other tribes and the Army, no deed of war was more honored than the act of counting coup. To count coup means to touch an armed enemy in full possession of his powers with a special stick called a coup stick, or with the hand. The touch is not a blow, and only serves to indicate how close to the enemy you came. As an act of bravery, counting coup was regarded as greater than killing an enemy in single combat, greater than taking a scalp or horses or any prize. Counting coup was an act of almost abstract courage, of pure playfulness taken to the most daring extreme. Very likely, to do it and survive brought an exhilaration to which nothing could compare. In an ancient sense which her Oglala kin could recognize, SuAnne counted coup on the fans of Lead.

And yet this coup was an act not of war but of peace. SuAnne's coup strike was an offering, an invitation. It took the hecklers at the best interpretation, as if their silly mocking chants were meant only in goodwill. It showed that their fake Indian songs were just

that—fake—and that the real thing was better, as real things usually are. We Lakota have been dancing like this for centuries, the dance said; we’ve been doing the shawl dance since long before you came, before you got on the boat in Glasgow or Bremerhaven, before you stole this land, and we’re still doing it today; and isn’t it pretty, when you see how it’s supposed to be done? Because finally what SuAnne proposed was to invite us—us onlookers in the stands, which is the non-Lakota rest of this country—to dance, too. She was in the Lead gym to play, and she invited us all to play. The symbol she used to include us was the warm-up jacket. Everyone in America has a warm-up jacket. I’ve got one, probably so do you, so did (no doubt) many of the fans at Lead. By using the warm-up jacket as a shawl in her impromptu shawl dance, she made Lakota relatives of us all.

“It was funny,” Doni De Cory said, “but after that game the relationship between Lead and us was tremendous. When we played Lead again, the games were really good, and we got to know some of the girls on the team. Later, when we went to a tournament and Lead was there, we were hanging out with the Lead girls and eating pizza with them. We got to know some of their parents, too. What SuAnne did made a lasting impression and changed the whole situation with us and Lead. We found out there are some really good people in Lead.”

DEMONSTRATIONS AND PROTESTS

Maxim 1 speaks of Nobel Peace Prize winners such as Maathai and Walesa. They were, as it happened, out in front. But it was the community, the organizations, that gave them the power. People make moral change *together!* Walesa even co-founded an organization literally called “Solidarity”—the very name announced that change only comes when many people stand together.

It may take demonstrations and protests, yes. Even the showing of a few people can sometimes make a difference at city council meetings or local school board meetings. At the other end of the scale, hundreds, or hundreds of thousands, may demonstrate—literally, make a *showing*—as well. The iconic 1963 civil rights March on Washington was such a demonstration: 200,000 people, black and white, came to make a showing, to stand up for rights too long denied.

“Demonstrations” in this sense can also become protests, especially when things are dire. In Eastern Europe in the 1990s, hundreds of thousands of students and other people took to the streets to protest, mostly non-violently, and soon enough to replace, authoritarian governments no longer propped up by the Soviet Union. It happened again during the “Arab Spring” in 2011

in Egypt and elsewhere. And, of course, there are regular demonstrations in America from all sides of the political and moral spectrum.

In protests, try to keep an ethical edge. Protests may be desperate, people may be angry or offended, rhetoric may be harder-edged, actions may be inflammatory. When media are present, it often becomes hard for the protestors to keep control of their own story: the focus shifts to the anger and the actions—they make for better television sound-bites and newspaper photos—rather than the values and the arguments. Behind the scenes, various forces are also jockeying for power—Egypt again being an example, this time cautionary. Sometimes such protests are necessary, but it is not easy to protest constructively and successfully. I have more to say on this in several maxims to come.

COMMUNITY ACTION

You can find change-making organizations and communities already in action right around you. In my own city, there are regular marches to raise funds to aid soup kitchens or preserve open space. “Communities in the Schools” programs aim to keep kids in school through mentoring by community adults and recent graduates. The Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) movement aims to support local farmers, as well as preserve rural open space, water quality, and the culture that goes with small farms. People buy the produce directly, know where it comes from, sometimes work the farms themselves—it’s not called *Community-Supported Agriculture* for nothing.

Indeed, a quick Web search turns up over three hundred service- and change-based organizations just in this one medium-sized city. What about yours?

It might be helpful to start by asking what change-making communities you are already part of, though perhaps you have not yet thought of them quite that way. Where is change already underway in your neighborhood or city of your business or work? If you belong to a religious congregation, for example, what kinds of social or community work is it already involved with? Is more help needed? Is there potential to broaden the work (perhaps, as your special contribution)? Historically, for example, it was the black churches that nurtured the civil rights movement. Lately nearly all of the established religions, from the most liberal to the most fundamentalist, are getting into environmental issues.

Communities also make change through the basic functions of local government. Vital matters are decided here: how well your community preserves open space, how fairly it deals with different neighborhoods or different groups’ concerns, what is taught in the schools, what kind of public transportation is supported, whether you will act as a community on pressing issues of the day, from problems with voting machines to global warming. All of these issues are decided in local meetings in which any citizen can take part.

When zoning changes are requested or new building proposals are being advanced, for example, many cities have open hearings, where anyone can come, hear, and discuss the proposals. Eventually there is also a vote—of whoever happens to show up. In the city where I live, the results then go to the City Planning Commission—on a nonbinding basis, but they do make a difference. I have seen one or two knowledgeable and concerned citizens stop an ill-conceived project in its tracks—and I have also seen the lawyers for that project publicly thank the community gadflies, by name, at a later meeting, for making them improve their projects. Next time, why couldn't this be you?

Likewise, school boards struggle with curricular issues: sex education, evolution and creation, and the like. Of course these can be frustrating struggles on all sides. The deeper point, though, is that community discussion of such questions is entirely appropriate in a democratic society, and school board meetings are a good place for it. We ought to be glad we live in a society in which there are places for such discussions. Again: Why not join them?

Cities and other localities even act on the global stage. In the absence of U.S. federal action on global warming, for example, state governors and even mayors of cities publicly committed their states or cities to meeting international greenhouse-gas emission standards. In the political arena, there are many national and international political discussions and communities as well: the political parties, both the old standards and small and new ones; human rights action groups such as Amnesty International; and national lobbying groups on a vast range of issues. Just enter the phrase "National Coalition for . . ." as a Web search, and in the blank you get everything from Literacy and Anti-Deportation Campaigns to Cancer Survivors, Haitian Health, the Promotion of History, Marine Conservation, Homeless Veterans, Life, Sexual Freedom, Dialogue and Deliberation . . . and on and on and on. There is no lack of ways to get involved.



Trust In Better Possibilities

Workers like Lech Walesa, along with a few jailed poets and playwrights in the former Czechoslovakia, imagined that standing up in their lonely way for the right thing could actually bring down authoritarian governments that had the whole might of the Soviet superpower behind them. These were not exactly “realistic” hopes. Nonetheless, these things came to pass. Maybe what’s “realistic” is a little more fluid than we think.

Likewise, South African tribal chief and rebel Nelson Mandela, jailed under often-brutal conditions for twenty-seven years by the apartheid regime, actually imagined that South Africans could forgive—forgive!—the apartheid regime for the decades of oppression it fostered, and go on together. Everyone expected a bloodbath, yet the seemingly totally impossible happened instead. Internationally, there have even been more than twenty “Truth and Reconciliation Commissions” on the model of South Africa. Chapter 12 briefly discussed a Truth and Reconciliation process in Greensboro, North Carolina; there have been many other efforts in America as well.

The moral of these stories is that much more is possible than we usually imagine. People and institutions have enormous but often unrecognized capacities for change and self-reorganization. We should not assume that ethical shifts are not possible just because, at the moment, things seem stuck the way they are. Some more radical or imaginative intervention may “change the whole situation.”

What if burglars or even murderers came into face-to-face dialogue with their victims and/or families? The stereotypes tell us it could never work. But already there are more than 300 “victim-offender mediation” programs around the country doing just this, coupled with various forms of prison and community ministry. Both sides ask questions, express their feelings, and struggle together. Mediators help them arrive at “next steps”: sometimes financial restitution, treatment plans, community service, and more creative options too. The movement even has a name: Restorative Justice.

“Black Lives Matter” actions and protests roiled the nation in the year before this writing. Mistrust of local police departments is deeply rooted in black communities, as Ta-Nehisi Coates explains in Reading 12, while many

officers feel unjustly accused or exposed or just do not understand. This will need to be worked out with care and time, but again we also ought to ask what kinds of constructive moves are possible right now, however unlikely they may seem. I heard just recently that the new Wichita, Kansas, police chief began his tenure by sponsoring a gathering and cookout with and for the Wichita black community, jointly sponsored by Wichita Black Lives Matter—a “deed,” on both sides, of first reaching out toward some sort of mutual understanding and potential reconciliation. Again: not that there isn’t a very long way to go to get there, but . . . who would have thought? And for the first time we can also discern the question: Why isn’t this a national model?

Trusting in better possibilities does not necessarily mean that we won’t sometimes be disappointed. Better possibilities do not always win out in the end; sometimes meanness or ignorance or avarice rules instead. This can be a bitter realization, when trust is betrayed and invitations are rejected or dismissed. Still, as Winston Churchill once said, we might as well be optimists anyway, because what is the point of being anything else? Selling the world short, betting that things will go badly, is one way in which we tend to promote just what we fear. Things are much more likely go badly if no one resists that hard or comes forward in the name of more hopeful possibilities. Betting that things could go well, and proceeding on that basis, creates a very different dynamic. If both can become self-fulfilling prophecies, in other words, the real question is which type of prophecy we’d rather see fulfilled—and the answer to *that* is surely quite clear.

So beware of the self-satisfied “realism” that looks at the world as it is (or anyway seems at the moment) and imagines that the world as it is is the only world possible. Actually, other worlds are closer than they might seem. The world will respond in the direction of our invitations—but often we need to make the offering, the invitation or even leap of faith, *first*. Mightn’t this even be part of what ethics itself asks?

“THE GOOD BANKER”

The Nobel Peace Prize for 2006 went to Muhammad Yunus, a Bangladeshi banker, inventor, and tireless promoter of “micro-credit” along with his creation, the now-famous Grameen Bank. Beginning by lending small amounts of money out of his own pocket to destitute village craftspeople, mostly women, Yunus discovered that such loans were enough to free the craftspeople from middlemen and make them canny and effective entrepreneurs. Scaffolding by support groups but with no collateral requirement and no repayment date, his loans are still repaid at a higher rate than many banks can

boast—out of, basically, *gratitude*. Talk about ethics in action when no one believed it possible!

Yunus started out as a professional economist, teaching “elegant theories of economics” (as he put it) in the newly independent Bangladesh while massive numbers of people were dying of hunger in the streets. The famine of 1974, which killed a million and a half Bangladeshis, changed his life. “Why did people who worked twelve hours a day, seven days a week, not have enough food to eat? I decided that the poor themselves would be my teachers. I began to study them and question them on their lives.”

He began to work with farmers and set up farmers’ cooperatives. But it soon became apparent that the truly destitute, the landless rural poor, needed some more dramatic kind of help. Alan Jolis’ article “The Good Banker” explains:

One day, interviewing a woman who made bamboo stools, [Yunus] learnt that, because she had no capital of her own, she had to borrow the equivalent of [30 cents] to buy raw bamboo for each stool made. After repaying the middleman, she kept only a [2 cent] profit margin. With the help of his graduate students, he discovered 42 other villagers in the same predicament.

“Their poverty was not a personal problem due to laziness or lack of intelligence, but a structural one: lack of capital. The existing system made it certain that the poor could not save a penny and could not invest in bettering themselves. Some money-lenders set interest rates as high as 10 per cent a month, some 10 per cent a week. So, no matter how hard these people worked, they would never raise themselves above subsistence level. What was needed was to link their work to capital to allow them to amass an economic cushion and earn a ready income.”

And so the idea of credit for the landless was born. Yunus’s first approach was to reach into his pocket and lend each of the 42 women the equivalent of [about \$40]. He set no interest rate and no repayment date: “I didn’t think of myself as a banker, but as the liberator of 42 families.”

Immediately, Yunus saw the impracticality of carrying on in this way, and tried to interest banks in institutionalizing his gesture by lending to the poorest, with no collateral. Bankers laughed at him, insisting that the poor are not “creditworthy.” Yunus answered, “How do you know they are not creditworthy, if you’ve never tried? Perhaps it is the banks that are not people-worthy?”

Yunus went on to create his own lending system, at first run by his own students; he then finally convinced the central bank to take it on and later incorporated Grameen to go it alone. Grameen Bank is now the largest rural bank in Bangladesh, with millions of borrowers. It also has spinoffs the world over, including more than five hundred community banks in the United States alone.

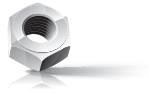
There is a key line: *How do you know they are not creditworthy, if you've never tried?* Generalized, that is the point in a nutshell. We cannot simply read the world's possibilities off the world as it presently stands. Only "trying" will show us what is possible—and we are likely to be surprised.

Yunus himself again:

Poverty covers people in a thick crust and makes the poor appear stupid and without initiative. Yet if you give them credit, they will slowly come back to life. Even those who seemingly have no conceptual thought, no ability to think of yesterday or tomorrow, are in fact quite intelligent and expert at the art of survival. Credit is the key that unlocks their humanity.

In short, he imagines that everyone has the ingenuity to lift themselves out of poverty. We just aren't going to see that ingenuity until it is given the chance to show itself—until it is given, of all things, *credit*.

4



Keep At It

Eighty percent of success is just showing up.

—Woody Allen

Persistence pays off, but you may need a lot of it. Few substantial ethical changes come easily or quickly. Many may actively oppose them, also perhaps on ethical grounds, and others may not see the point. It takes time and devotion.

First of all, of course, figure out the best and most necessary cause(s) and venue(s). Maxim 2 speaks of the variety of forms that ethical change work can take—choose thoughtfully! Even this may take a bit of time and exploring. Once you have decided, be ready to show up and keep showing up. If you are joining an ethical-change organization, go to meetings! Meet the people, see what needs to be done. Again, if your interests run toward local governance, show up at city council and school board meetings or when the community responds to crises or opportunities that arise. If you are a student, check out your student government, and also campus committees and other institutional planning and organizing that involves students along with faculty and administrators.

Make yourself visible at such meetings—and, when you are ready, make yourself heard. In most organizations, new people with ideas and energy are always very welcome. Speak up! Also, watch who else shows up. You will probably encounter a similar cross-section of civic-minded people at a variety of public and organizational venues. Introduce yourself, see what is happening, who they represent and who stands behind them. Make yourself one of them!

You will not always succeed. Perhaps the time or the cause will turn out to be wrong, or the resistance even to the best cause will be just too strong. Change activists need to be prepared to fail. More important, still, is to speak up and act up for the right thing regardless—being open, of course, to learning and change ourselves as we go, as well. Moreover, we do not always know what difference we are really making. The world often moves in subtle and circuitous ways. Here is one encouraging story, described by Paul Rogat Loeb in his collection *The Impossible Will Take a Little While*.

In the early 1960s, a friend of mine named Lisa took two of her kids to a Washington, DC vigil in front of the White House protesting nuclear testing. The demonstration was small, a hundred women at most. Rain poured down. The women felt frustrated and powerless. A few years later, the movement against testing had grown dramatically, and Lisa attended a major march. Benjamin Spock . . . [*pediatrician and author known to every parent and child in the 1950s generation*] spoke. He described how he'd come to take a stand, which because of his stature had already influenced thousands, and would reach far more when he challenged the Vietnam War. Spock talked briefly about the issues, then mentioned that when he was in DC a few years earlier he saw a small group of women huddled, with their kids, in the rain. It was Lisa's group. "I thought if those women were out there," he said, "their cause must be really important."

Just seeing their demonstration was enough to set him down the path. Lisa might never have known that she and a few others had helped change the course of history, yet they had.

Likewise, it doesn't detract from Rosa Parks's courage and her accomplishment to know that her arrest, and the bus boycott that followed, was carefully planned and prepared. And who, Loeb asks, got her started? It turns out that she was prompted to attend her first NAACP meeting by her husband, who was already involved. And who got *him* involved? Loeb concludes: "Even in a seemingly losing cause, one person may unknowingly inspire another, and that person yet a third, who could go on to change the world."

So be careful not to judge yourself or someone else a failure just because you, or they, maybe did not have the immediate effect hoped for. The world does not necessarily change that fast. Take care, also, not to suppose that the only worthwhile ends of action are quick and clear "results." Do what is right and don't worry too much about it. You never know what pathways you may be starting for yourself or someone else.

READING 37

Malala

MAGGIE CASTOR

MAGGIE CASTOR is currently working towards a Master in Ethics and Applied Philosophy at UNC-Charlotte and has earned a MLIS from the University of British Columbia and a BA in Philosophy from Elon University. Maggie's work centers on difference as an asset to constructively and critically engage conflict in order to work towards more just communities.

Malala. A young woman whose first name alone evokes global recognition for surviving a 2012 assassination attempt by the Taliban—when she was just fifteen years old—because she was so outspoken about every girl’s right to an education. Yet in so many ways Malala Yousafzai was and is an ordinary young person. She herself insisted on this point being known as she became the youngest ever Nobel Peace Prize laureate, stating in her acceptance speech, “I tell my story not because it is unique but because it is not. It is the story of many girls.”¹

Malala has lived in Birmingham, England, since recovering from her injuries in the attempted assassination, but you would be hard-pressed to read anything about her without encountering her deep adoration for her home in the Swat Valley district in the northwest province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan. Her love of her land and its people is explicit in interview after interview, but it is vibrantly embodied by her actions and ethical commitments. From the early 1900s, the people of the area have deeply valued and expanded opportunity and infrastructure for education, including education for girls. The commitment to education for all is also a cornerstone of Yousafzai’s family values. Malala’s father, Ziauddin, one of her biggest inspirations and supporters, himself founded and ran schools, inclusive of girls, in the Swat Valley. Considering this, it is no surprise that Malala is so committed to her studies, insistent upon going to school, and articulate about why access to education is so important for all. Yet it is her steadfast commitment to her values as represented in her day-to-day behaviors—even in the face of the Taliban bombing schools, demanding that girls do not attend school, and that girls and women stay at home—that catapulted her to national recognition.

In 2008, at eleven years old, Malala started joining her father at the local press club to assert her right to go to school. Given the local political context, such an assertion was synonymous with speaking against the Taliban. Later that year, BBC Urdu was looking for a schoolgirl in the area to anonymously blog about how life was impacted by the rise of the Taliban. While many girls were courageously continuing their education, it was Malala, with the support of her family, who took up the request. She even resisted BBC Urdu’s insistence she use a pen name, believing in the importance of honesty in one’s identity when taking a stand on an

¹ Mirren Gidda, “Malala Yousafzai’s New Mission: Can She Still Inspire as an Adult?” *Newsweek*, Jan. 1, 2017, <http://www.newsweek.com/2017/01/20/exclusive-malala-yousafzai-interview-davos-540978.html>.

issue. While the blog was ultimately anonymous, the connection to Malala was easy to make, since she was increasingly speaking in public about the right of all children to education, and becoming a peer educator for the Open Minds Pakistan youth program to foster dialoguing skills in young people around social issues. Again, while it is easy to paint the precocious young woman as unusual, reading her blog highlights a strikingly average seventh grader with unsuccessful trips to the market for the right pair of earrings and playing with her younger brothers to, for so many young people, further average accounts with unsuccessful trips to the market because spaces for girls and women have been closed or consoling her brother as he questions whether the loud noise he just heard was a bomb.

Malala's efforts persisted throughout the years. "Malala's voice was the most powerful voice in Swat," her father stated, "because the biggest victim of the Taliban was girls' schools and girls' education and few people talked about it. . . . When she [spoke] about education, everybody gave it importance."² Her effectiveness stemmed from her conviction, her youth, her gender, her education, even as these very aspects were threatened by (and threatening to) the Taliban. Ultimately, the Taliban's attempt to silence Malala led to her voice being amplified throughout the world.

After her recovery, Malala continued—and continues today—her advocacy for education in much the same fashion as before. She and her father started the Malala Fund, an initiative they were working on before the assassination attempt—although now on a much larger scale, advocating for children's, including girls', right to education. While a global initiative, Malala continues to recognize that this work is needed and manifest differently in distinct communities. As of December 2016, the Gulmakai Network was supporting education champions addressing localized threats to education, recognizing that local people best understand the challenges their own community faces, and, thus, the most effective strategies to these challenges. Malala also continues to speak to the press and to politicians. And while her intention has remained to be a politician in her beloved Swat Valley or on a national level in Pakistan, she is also engaging political leaders around the world. She is making herself a tireless advocate for her ethical commitments. Yet, she is also a young woman trying to live an ordinary

² Mishal Husain, "Malala: The Girl Who Was Shot for Going to School," *BBC News-Magazine*, Oct. 7, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-24379018>.

life, pursuing her lifelong goals of an education, and advocating for her values within her community. Listening to her speak about her experiences since the attempted assassination and the global acclaim that followed, it has been noted she sometimes slips into speaking about Malala in the third person, as if the day-to-day Malala cannot possibly be the same person known globally for her pursuit of an education. Indian author Tabish Khair depicts Malala in this way: “[Her] importance lies in her ability to be ordinary and still live an ethical and inspirational life. . . . To make her into an idol is to deny this, reduce it. Moreover, it is also to negate so many other Malalas who are fighting out there—many in very ordinary ways, like by quietly covering their heads and going to school despite frowning elders.”³

In 2017, at nineteen years old, Malala is preparing to go to college, nervous about the application process and where she will get in. And this—starting college classes in the fall—just might be Malala’s most important ethical commitment and action yet.

³ Mirren Gidda, “Malala Yousafzai’s New Mission: Can She Still Inspire as an Adult?” *Newsweek*, Jan. 1, 2017, <http://www.newsweek.com/2017/01/20/exclusive-malala-yousafzai-interview-davos-540978.html>.

YES, YOU!

Most users of this book will be students and probably young. People like you, you might be thinking, seldom have the connections or the power to make major ethical changes.

Sometimes it’s true. Sometimes making change does take powers you don’t yet have. But only sometimes. Remember that some of the change-makers featured in this very guide are just like you, or even younger. SuAnne Big Crow, for instance, was only fourteen, a high school student. Malala Yousafzai was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize at the age of seventeen.

Moreover, sometimes it’s precisely the fact that you *are* young people or students that gives you a kind of power that older people don’t have. For one thing, simply being a student gives you a natural solidarity with other students everywhere. You can organize as students across campuses, across the country, even across the world. This is especially true when the ethical issues around which you organize show up on campus—and across campuses—in

distinctive ways. Students around the country stand in the forefront of organizing against sweatshops, for example, because their universities are among the prime customers for products made in sweatshops: clothes stamped with university logos. Students have a good bit of leverage at their own institutions, and universities, being large single-order customers, have a good bit of leverage over suppliers. Very specific changes can therefore be demanded. This is why national organizations like Students Against Sweatshops are natural, and have been very effective in recent years.

Maxim 1 already spoke of the student movements in Eastern Europe in the 1990s that helped bring down authoritarian governments across the region. Not that it was easy. Whole universities were closed down. Activists were harassed and sometimes “disappeared.” The entrenched political leadership stalled or sympathized (without changing anything) or just lied through their teeth. But the students persisted. They took their universities back, or started “Free Universities” of their own. They continued to take to the streets—and increasingly to the airwaves and the Internet. Older people had all the power, or so it seemed—but the young had the *chutzpah* (and the computer savvy!) to catch the attention of the world. It happened again during the “Arab Spring” in 2011 in country after country in the Middle East. Young people and students were in the lead. In Egypt, massive demonstrations were organized on social media, while the stodgy old police, guardians of the established order, had no clue.

Nearly all of this was accomplished peacefully. Here too the students’ powerlessness—in the usual terms—was crucial to their success. Think of that unknown young tank-stopper in Tiananmen Square again. He could have been crushed in a second, but—almost precisely because of that—he wasn’t. Hundreds of students at Tiananmen went on a hunger strike to advance their demands, prompting the national leadership itself to come to the Square and plead with them not to starve themselves to death. (“We were young once too,” they said.) The students invoked a long-standing Chinese archetype of the selfless intellectual who speaks truth to power. Physically powerless but just for that reason morally *powerful*.

Young people stand among the most prominent ethical change-makers in the United States as well. The Freedom Riders, for example, young black and white people together, rode interstate buses into the segregated South in the summer of 1961 to test a Supreme Court decision outlawing racial segregation in interstate transportation facilities—and to visibly model a new respect and cooperation across racial lines. They were imprisoned, beaten, and harassed. But when one group could no longer take the violence, student organizers brought in others. They kept coming. By the end of that summer the Interstate Commerce Commission was enforcing and extending the Supreme Court decision, and the civil rights movement had been galvanized.

Campaigns for voter registration and desegregation of restaurants, hotels, and workplaces were underway as well—again often spearheaded by young people. One of the many leaders of this action was John Lewis, soon to chair the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and now a long-time U.S. Congressperson from Atlanta and one of the leaders of the Congressional Black Caucus.

So take heart, students! There is much that you can do, and perhaps some things that *only* you can do.



Creative Leveraging

A fifth maxim is: use your creativity. Strategic and creative skills may be pushed to the side when we think of ethics primarily as a mode of heartfelt and dialogic response. But other skills come into play as well—and sometimes creativity is the most crucial.

Deliberately and systematically use the prompts suggested in chapter 13, like Brainstorming, “Compare and Contrast,” Reversal and Exaggeration, and Revisiting Outlying Parts of the Problem. I will be the first to admit that this will often feel awkward or even inappropriate. “We’re tackling a serious problem here,” people will say. “This is no time for playfulness.” On the contrary, though, chapter 13 argues that tackling such problems is *precisely* the time for playfulness.

Too self-conscious a seriousness can itself be confining when new ideas or possibilities are not sought out and are not even welcome. The best options may lie at an unsuspected and even wild angle to the options that define themselves as the only serious ones in advance. Alongside the familiar kinds of work on homelessness, for example, there are truly amazing initiatives underway. The Homeless World Cup organizes annual international street soccer tournaments with teams made up of homeless people. Another project facilitates and trains homeless people to mount opera, of all things—no kidding—and places them in arts organizations and as performers. (“With Streetwise Opera I not only exist, I live,” says one formerly homeless participant.) Why not?

Or again, remember that in chapter 13 we arrived at some excellent alternatives to school dissection not by confining ourselves to “the” problem as first defined—what to do if a student objects to dissection on moral grounds—but rather by “exaggerating” and “stretching” ideas in various ways that at first seemed silly or even offensive, like dissecting each other. Three steps or so later we had devised a way of learning anatomy that could be vastly better than dissection for everyone. What if we tried the same kind of methods for our most pressing social problems?

“Watch for suggestive facts” was another recommended method for creative exploration. Once again, this is a method not at all restricted to personal moral issues. Suggestive facts surround us all the time.

Case in point: Bo Lozoff, cofounder along with his wife Sita of the Human Kindness Foundation, was living in a yoga ashram—a secluded and

intensive religious community—when he noticed with a certain shock, visiting a relative in jail, that their life was not so different from the life of a prisoner. Both are very highly constrained and lack many worldly comforts. But the Lozoffs' life was *liberating*.

How interesting, he thought. And just possibly a creative provocation. He went on to create the "Prison-Ashram Project" to enable prisoners to treat their prisons as ashrams: that is, to make use of the very isolation and "deprivation" and silence that can make prison so awful as, instead, occasions for spiritual growth. He reframed the entire experience and institution of prison.

Among the many recognitions Lozoff received for this work was an award for "Creative Altruism" from the Institute for Noetic Sciences. Creative. Altruism. Those two words are not often put together. But why not?

Careful and inventive strategizing is often needed to find the best "leverage points," so to speak, from which to try to make change. Ask yourself (and others) where real movement is possible, and where you can make the most change with the most efficient effort. On campus, for example, directly battling many students' seeming addiction to fast foods and throw away containers, say, by offering more classes on nutrition or by multiplying recycling bins, may be a constant uphill struggle. In any case it won't turn the tide by itself. Suppose instead that you work with the food service to change the cafeteria offerings, or with local take out restaurants to use only biodegradable containers? Here you could have a big and quick impact.

A recent article in *The Atlantic* describes how many gay-rights activists came to embrace the gay marriage campaign as a way to leverage greater understanding and acceptance of gay people. The U.S. Supreme Court rejected the first gay-marriage appeal out of hand in 1972, and as late as 2012, constitutional bans on gay marriage were passing even in liberal states like California, and, to add insult to injury, in states where gay marriage was already banned by law. In 1996 Congress overwhelmingly passed the Defense of Marriage Act, a law defining marriage as between a man and woman for purposes of federal law, and President Clinton signed it.

Up to that point, though, the arguments had been framed on the basis of legal equality. However justified, the arguments were clearly not working. Evan Wolfson, attorney and gay-rights advocate, describes a different strategic approach that surprisingly quickly turned the tide:

I thought, What is the center, the heart, of the discrimination gay people face? It's the denial of our love. And what is the central institution of love? It's marriage. Therefore, we needed to claim the freedom to marry, because it would be an engine of transformation for the way society viewed gay people.

("How Gay Marriage Became a Constitutional Right," *The Atlantic*, June 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/07/gay-marriage-supreme-court-politics-activism/397052/>)

This struggle is ongoing, of course, and Wolfson's strategy is still debatable to some, but the Supreme Court's affirmation of same-sex marriage as a constitutional right in *Obergefell v. Hodges* in 2015 was obviously a major turning-point.

For us the key thing to note is Wolfson's strategic thinking. What is the center of the problem? he asks. What is the sticking-point? Exactly the right questions to ask of "stuck" problems in general. Polling, it turns out, was showing that straight people tended to think that gay people wanted to *change* marriage rather than *join* it. Focusing on love and commitment could shift this perception dramatically . . . and that was the path taken.

Look for the small interventions, then, that can produce big changes as the system adjusts: places where manageable and maybe even tiny efforts can have effects across a broad front. Upstream, so to speak, small redirections of flow. Downstream—everything could shift.

THE POWER OF WITNESS

You may have heard of the group Doctors Without Borders.

Doctors Without Borders/Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is an independent international medical humanitarian organization that delivers emergency aid to people affected by armed conflict, epidemics, natural or man-made disasters, or exclusion from health care in more than 70 countries....In emergencies and their aftermath, MSF provides health care, rehabilitates and runs hospitals and clinics, performs surgery, battles epidemics, carries out vaccination campaigns, operates feeding centers for malnourished children, and offers mental health care.

A line featured on their website is simple and eloquent: "There is so little care available that the only ethical position is to take action" (Jean Hevre Bradol). They too have been awarded a Nobel Peace Prize—as a whole organization.

MSF also is committed to what they call "witness." It is again, a strategic move, a way to leverage and amplify the power of what otherwise may be a heart-breakingly limited ability to help. They do not simply deal with the medical need and suffering they see on the ground. They also aim to make it visible to others as a way of making change.

MSF unites direct medical care with a commitment to speaking out against the causes of suffering and the obstacles to providing effective assistance. MSF volunteers raise the concerns of their patients with governments, the United Nations, other international bodies, the general public, and the media. In a wide range of circumstances, MSF volunteers have spoken out

against violations of international humanitarian law they have witnessed—from Chechnya to Sudan.

This tradition of “witness” is carried on by other change-oriented organizations, such as the environmental direct-action group Greenpeace. Rex Wyler, cofounder of Greenpeace International, was interviewed on this theme in 2006:

The Quaker idea of bearing witness is that when we witness an event, especially when we witness injustice, we become an agent of change. If you see injustice and you understand it as injustice, you almost can't help but become an agent of change—even if all you do is talk about it or point it out or shine the light of day on it.

So “shine the light of day” is part of what Greenpeace did:

One of our innovations was to actively engage the electronic media and produce images that we knew and felt strongly would move through that media. For example, most people—when they thought of whaling at that time in the late '60s, early '70s—would have had a 19th-century version in their mind's eye: little men going up against Leviathan, throwing spears out of boats. That was the image that people had of whaling from all the woodcuts and artwork of the *Moby-Dick* era. No one had ever seen a whale being dragged up on the stern of a factory ship, making it look like a little fish.

Greenpeace began sending dramatic and gruesome images around the world of what an industrialized whale hunt actually looks like. Everyone became a witness, and it was no longer possible just to turn away. Activists also began putting themselves in small boats on the high seas between harpooners' guns and whales, as well as chaining themselves to chemical discharge pipes to protect rivers and sailing or hiking into nuclear test zones to put their own bodies in the way of bomb tests.

There is also a deeper aspect of “witness”: making unethical acts visible in a new way to the perpetrators themselves. Often we think that in the face of unethical actions our only or best response must be force: actually stopping the actions. Quakers and others committed to nonviolence, by contrast, argue that simply stopping such an action does nothing to address the ethical failures that brought it about in the first place. In fact it may worsen some of them, locking the perpetrators into a new self-perception as victims. Ultimately the perpetrators themselves must be changed, and (the idea goes) this change can be set off if the perpetrators are made to see themselves through someone else's eyes. They cannot any longer act so anonymously or

habitually, or respond automatically as they would if they were physically or otherwise threatened or attacked.

In this respect Rex Wyler isn't quite right to say, "No one had ever seen a whale being dragged up on the stern of a factory ship." The *whalers* saw it all the time. On the Quaker theory, though, they hadn't quite *seen* it—that is, fully looked at it, understood it, rather than simply accepting it or not thinking about it—until they had to see it through someone else's eyes. Just watching, then—just "witness"—can be a powerful force for ethical change.

Both groups lobby in the traditional way too. Greenpeace advocates much stronger environmental protection, permanent weapons test bans, and of course an end to whaling and other assaults on the seas and sea creatures. And MSF again:

Based on its field experience, MSF is addressing obstacles preventing people in the developing world from obtaining affordable, effective treatments for diseases such as HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis.... MSF is advocating to lower drug prices, stimulate research and development of new treatments, and overcome trade and other barriers to accessing treatments....



Stay Open to Complexity

It can be tempting to picture ethical change-makers as single-minded, even fanatical, and to think that we must make ourselves the same in order to succeed. When this book tells you to find your own way, persist, and have confidence that dramatic change is possible, it may seem that these guidelines too suggest a kind of dogged self-confidence or even moral self-righteousness.

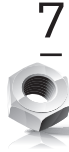
Notice, though, the stories I have told actually have a different moral. The change-makers I have featured are firm in certain ways, but not in a narrow-minded or self-righteous way. Muhammad Yunus is devoted to eradicating poverty (completely!), but his means are maximally flexible and creative. SuAnne Big Crow made change just by dancing and singing, inviting a hostile crowd to look again. The lawyers for gay marriage, just mentioned, sought to persuade married straight people by affirming the love and commitment symbolized by marriage, not by rejecting it.

If anyone in these stories is morally self-righteous or dogmatic, it is the defenders of the status quo. They're the ones a little too (or a lot too) comfortable with how things are—too threatened, maybe, by the thought of change to see the change-makers clearly. They're the ones who will not understand your motives and will make all sorts of stereotypical assumptions—such as, most basically, that you're the fanatic.

Don't fall into that stereotype! Part of your strength, in fact, is that you are (can be) much more flexible. You are more apt to build alliances, find an unexpectedly innovative alternative, to bring together a variety of values into some more balanced picture.

On the other hand, advocating for ethical change can put you out in edgy and controversial territory. Many of those we celebrate—even many of those Nobel winners, for example—worked for changes that at the time seemed politically and even ethically questionable to most people: civil rights, “tree-hugging,” religious diversity, artistic and political freedom under Communism.

So again: in ongoing and unsettled struggles, avoid stereotyping any of the advocates involved, even the ones you don't like, as fanatics. And avoid sliding toward narrow- and single-mindedness yourself. Think one more time of our debates over guns, or abortion, or the ethical claims of other animals. Sometimes, I am sure, some of the people involved really *are* fanatics. But that is no reason to make ourselves fanatical in response, or to respond to others only in a dismissive or single-minded way. Expect to find common ground; stay open to complexity in your own stance and to complementarity in others'.



There Is No Way to Ethics; Ethics *Is* the Way

There is a Gandhian saying you may have heard: “There is no way to peace; peace is the way.” This puzzles people. Isn’t peace a goal that we are struggling for, someday to achieve down the road? Not exactly, says Gandhi. We certainly work for a world in which everyone has well-developed and nonviolent habits of living with and working out conflicts. Yes. Right here and now, though, *we* at least can develop our own nonviolent habits of living with and working out conflicts, including our conflicts with those who themselves are prone to violence. Peace can be how we relate to each other *right now*.

Exactly the same is true in ethics proper. There is no way to ethics; ethics *is* the way. We can certainly work for a world in which everyone has well-developed ethical habits and a full ethical toolbox. Yes. But right here and now *we*, at least, can develop our own ethical habits, including ways to deal ethically with those who themselves have only a few ethical tools, or none at all. Ethics can be how we relate to each other *right now*.

Here’s another of Gandhi’s sayings you may have heard or seen on a bumpersticker:

YOU MUST BE THE CHANGE YOU WISH TO SEE IN THE WORLD

In the first place, this means: actually *do* something. Promote the change you wish to see in the world. Advocate a serious environmental ethic, for example, in part by actually living it.

This much is obvious. The deeper meaning is more intriguing and difficult. Acting in the name of ethics, even as we strive to bring that ideal into reality, we cannot and must not act in ways that are unethical or violate that ideal. Do not imagine that you can achieve peace with your neighbors by killing some of them. You may attain the façade of peace, but hatred and pain will be at its foundation still and will poison the so-called peace in time. Do not imagine that legally imposing your ethics on other people somehow makes the world right. Maybe sometimes we will conclude that it is necessary, but the true

ethical change only follows when you, or they, bring others around by force of example, by word and deed, by *being* a full-fledged ethics in action.

An environmentalist friend of mine says: People will not live in harmony with nature until we also come to live in harmony with *each other*. Therefore it does not effectively promote long-term environmentalist goals to create sustained conflict among people: politically, in local communities, wherever. No: our way of moving toward an ecological future must itself be ecological. It must seek connection, mutuality, interdependence, synergy—right now, and in every move we make toward a more ecological world. Even when we must set ourselves into opposition to others, do not let it become total opposition. Hug trees *and* hug people! she concludes. Let us live our own lives in ways that so manifest a love for Creation in all its forms that other people, feeling themselves already included in that love, are drawn to change their lives too.

Maybe this sounds way too sentimental or idealistic for us? Gandhi, though, would not regard it as sentimental or idealistic at all. It's just *practical*...

STANDING AT STANDING ROCK

Meeting the challenge to *Be the change we wish to see in the world* requires that our actions for ethical ends should themselves be ethical. No cutting moral corners: the means of “making a difference” should be as wholly ethical as the ends.

The ideal also goes well beyond merely meeting basic moral requirements. There is a visionary or aspirational aspect as well. As far as possible, we should seek to infuse the “means” themselves with the richness and depth that we want in a fully ethical and humanly fulfilling life. Depending on the most relevant family of moral values, this could mean trying for the most widely satisfying ways of making a difference, or the most virtuous overall, or fully affirming of persons or of relationships within and beyond the human sphere—or, best of all, all of these!

You may recall that **Going Farther** #1 very briefly introduced the American pragmatist philosopher John Dewey. We could add now that Dewey would also insist that the distinction between ends and means is in many ways misleading, and, if misapplied, potentially deadening. Means and ends are not so completely distinct. It might be better to think in exactly the opposite way and imagine that every means is also an end in itself. Thus, again, as we work to change the world or promote or resist some important change being advanced by others, we should also imagine this very activity as an ethical end in itself.

What does this look like? One answer is: even if our means are demonstrations and protests, then, and even if they take place in the midst of

indignation and desperation, we should at the same time try to carry on in ways that themselves represent the way life ought to be. By way of illustration, here is an account of a protest that is much in the news as I prepare this edition of *Toolbox*.

The Dakota Access Pipeline protests began in spring 2016 to resist the construction of an oil pipeline running from western North Dakota to southern Illinois, crossing beneath the continent's largest rivers as well as passing near the Standing Rock Indian Reservation. Members of that tribe argue that the pipeline and its river crossing threaten the region's clean water and also their ancient tribal burial grounds. Indeed, some tribal sacred grounds have already been bulldozed as construction proceeds. Over the summer of 2016 a Sioux camp established in the path of the planned pipeline near the river grew to thousands of people. As of September, the protest constituted the single largest gathering of Native Americans in more than a century, and many others joined the camp as well.

The protests drew wide attention around the world, and have, in the words of a joint statement by the U.S. Departments of Justice, Army, and Interior, "highlighted the need for a serious discussion on whether there should be nationwide reform with respect to considering tribes' views on these types of infrastructure projects." Protestors, who call themselves "water protectors," tried to stop bulldozers entering sacred grounds but were set upon by security workers using attack dogs, in an incident that was later viewed by several million people on social media. When winter arrived, police used water cannons on the protestors, who nonetheless remained peaceful: this incident too drew major media coverage around the world. A temporary victory was won in December 2016 when the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers denied an easement for construction of the pipeline under the Missouri River, pending a major environmental impact study. As of this writing, many water protectors, including a large contingent of veterans, continue camping on the site, fearing the pipeline is only temporarily blocked.

The brief report that follows does not detail all of this history or try to justify the tribes' stand. Indeed, that is not the point here. Not all readers will understand or agree or sympathize, but I think we can all at least admire the spirit in which the protestors/protectors are standing their ground. The report describes the protestors'/protectors' camp and how it runs, emphasizing the unity among often-contending tribes, the resurgence of native activism in defense of the earth, as they would say, and the feeling of daily life and solidarity in the camp.

Young people ride through the camp on horseback among tents and teepees. Are they providing security, learning traditional animal caretaking, or just having fun together?

Of course, it is all of these.

Here, with a purpose that threads through generations, work, celebration, and activism are a seamless whole. This is how we should be living, one person at our camp says.

This is how we should be living—that is, all the time! Once again, being the change. . . .

READING 38

At Standing Rock, a Sense of Purpose

SARAH VAN GELDER

SARAH VAN GELDER is co-founder and editor at *Yes!* magazine. This is a report from a road trip she recently undertook to, as she puts it, “meet the quirky and the committed, the local heroes and the healers who are building a better world, one community at a time.”

Drive from Bismarck, North Dakota . . . past rolling grasslands with an occasional farmhouse, until there is nothing but open space. Catch a glimpse of the Missouri River meandering back and forth, and a flock of white pelicans circling overhead. Miles later, by the side of the road, stands a small encampment—tents, a camp kitchen, a group of people watching the road warily, banners declaring water, not oil, as sacred. Across the road is the bulldozed earth in an area that Standing Rock Sioux consider sacred. This is where the security forces with dogs attacked the people who call themselves water protectors.

The most dramatic moment, though, comes with the approach to the main encampment. Suddenly, just below the road, is a wide field covered in tents, teepees, and trucks. Lining the main entrance is flag after flag, each representing one of the indigenous nations that has offered its support to the Standing Rock Sioux and their fight against the Dakota Access pipeline.

Sarah van Gelder, “At Standing Rock, a Sense of Purpose: ‘This Is How We Should Be Living.’” *Yes!* Magazine, September 14, 2016. Reproduced with permission.

The impact is powerful. So many people have traveled hundreds or thousands of miles to make this pilgrimage. When people first meet, they ask each other where they're from. Some are old friends, but many represent tribes that have been estranged or enemies for generations. Many spoke of the arrival of representatives of the Crow Nation, who have a long history of supporting coal mining and working at odds with other tribes. They too came to support Standing Rock.

The purposefulness here overcomes everything—the determination that this time the damage will be stopped. This time, before the water is poisoned or another sacred site is bulldozed, the protectors will step in.

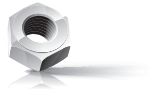
That sense of purpose pervades the camp. While some plan the next direct action or post on social media, others split wood for fires, sort the river of donations flowing unabated into the camp, or cook for thousands of people in makeshift camp kitchens. . . . [A]s we set up our tents, a young man on horseback came by to check on us. Later, a small all-terrain vehicle pulled up with jugs of water for the horse and the campers. Others stopped to offer donated kitchen supplies, food, and a garbage pickup. . . .

Up at the ceremonial grounds by the entrance, hundreds line up for dinner. No money changes hands. The flags whip in the wind. A prayer, then a speech, then a song fills the air.

Life at the water protectors' encampment is much like life was for millions of years of human evolution—close to the earth, near a river, clustered in family and community camps. There's a rightness to these connections and to the feeling that people here will help you when you need it.

Here, with a purpose that threads through generations, work, celebration, and activism are a seamless whole. Young people ride through the camp on horseback among tents and teepees. Are they providing security, learning traditional animal caretaking, or just having fun together? Elders tell stories of Wounded Knee, say prayers, and sing. Are they educating the next generation, building coherence, or guiding the actions? These things are not separate. They are all of a piece, all about rebuilding indigenous ways of life and standing against further destruction. . . .

This is how we should be living, one person at our camp says. We give what we have to give, and take what we need. Protecting the water and sacred sites brought people here. But the experience of being here is changing lives and creating renewed unity across indigenous nations, and with it a purpose and power and confidence that will not be easily extinguished.



Bring Your Whole Toolbox

Once you've jumped in to making change, be sure to bring along your whole ethical toolbox. All of it, in all its detail and variety. Take heed of Part I's insistence on ethical thinking—for ourselves, with others, all the time, seeking to find clearer and better ways forward together, and regardless of what we may think in our armchair moments about the “relativity” of values or what religious-ethical standpoint we may bring to the public sphere. Remember Part II's invocation of our living moral traditions while at the same time keeping them supple and subtle, a powerful resource for articulating moral values of all sorts, as well as for systematically seeking out those that may have been overlooked or obscured. Make use of Part III's expanded repertoire of practical but at the same time potentially transformative skills, from minding the evidence to judging like cases alike, dialogue and conflict resolution, and creativity and vision—thinking “out of the box” on issues where other people, and even the moral tradition, might not even realize that we are *in* a “box.”

Embrace the resourceful and constructive ethical practitioner you have become: cheerful, problem-oriented, pragmatic, adaptable. Of course you can take strong moral stands when necessary—and you will be better able to do that too, bringing the families of moral values more systematically to bear—but you also very emphatically refuse to reduce morality just to such stands. You do not imagine that you have to proclaim single, definitive moral judgments or decide complex matters by rule or rote, imagining that there are only a few options to consider or that one and only one of these is somehow the right answer. Your aim instead is to make an intelligent and constructive contribution in problematic ethical situations, and this may be in a wide variety of ways. It may even mean devoting most of your energies to simply heading the situation off next time. You have much more latitude than the usual judgmental moralist—if you consciously take it. In short, you are well-equipped!

It is in the very nature of a good toolbox that it enables such a wide range of responses. Think about it: if all someone has for a tool is a hammer, say, or a bread knife, then they will naturally try to turn every building project or challenge into something that they can do by hammering or slicing bread. This might be practical if mostly you just need to drive nails or cut soft foods.

Once in a while, in a pinch, these tools might also be adapted to a few other uses, like propping doors open or cutting fabric. But what about when the task is changing a lightbulb or taking a baby's temperature or transplanting tomatoes?

And what about situations when the problem isn't clear and the first task is just to figure it out? Your car's starter motor isn't working, say: maybe a tap or two with a hammer is necessary, but maybe it needs to be rewired, or maybe the battery is failing and needs to be tested. Or maybe you would be wiser, all told, just to stay home today. The person who will make a genuinely intelligent and constructive contribution in open-ended cases is the one who has and can use a very wide range of tools: a hammer, for sure, but also voltage-tester, garlic press, sewing needle, and many more, including maybe a little beer and a good story or two.

Be that person in ethics. Confronting an ethically problematic situation or mobilizing yourself and others to work for ethical change, don't start by assuming that only a few of your tools, or only one type of tool, really applies. Sometimes maybe you need to work carefully at uncovering and spelling out the basic values involved, to give them voice: Is this what we really mean? Are these the key values after all? Then again, other times, empirical facts may be at stake; how can you help people find and acknowledge them? Or again, how can we talk better about the issue or recognize that both/all sides are standing up for values that matter? Do we need to reframe problems or seek more worked-out moral visions? And so on. Keep *all* of your skills sharp and ready for use, and approach all of your problems with an open enough mind to listen and look carefully and try out many of your tools in the most attentive and versatile way you can.

When good cheer fails, there is at least courage. I hope some of the change-makers featured in the boxes in this guide have been inspiring examples. Yet, once again, they also draw on a range of other skills or tools too: Goska's self-possession, for example; SuAnne Big Crow's improvisation (and dance skills!); Yunus's attentiveness to the people he would serve and inventiveness even in the staid world of banking; the Standing Rock Sioux's standing together in ancient forms of community with each other and "All Our Relations." They are effective *because* they bring to ethics everything they've got. Let's go and do likewise.



GOING FARTHER #17

PERSONAL ETHICAL MISSION STATEMENTS

BY NIM BATCHELOR

Imagine those deathbed scenes where dying people recount all the ways that they wish they had lived their lives differently. They regret that they failed to give their most important values their proper priority and that they did not build or live a life in accord with their most important values. As the saying goes, no one's dying wish is that they had watched more television.

Similarly, we are all familiar with stories about people who have survived a serious brush with death. Often these people respond by undertaking a serious re-evaluation of their lives, which sometimes leads them to initiate radical changes. We also see this kind of "value panic" in the phenomenon called a "midlife crisis." In all of these cases we see a life in which relatively trivial concerns have somehow managed to become taken too seriously or in which that person's important values have been subordinated or neglected. The good news, of course, is that if you are reading this right now, it is not too late for you to take steps to avoid living a life that you might later come to regret. You are still "response-able."

This exercise asks you to write a personal ethical mission statement. You can do this in many ways—I will suggest some alternative forms below—but however you do it, a personal mission statement typically lays out and explains a set of values, principles, and commitments that are central to the life that you hope to live. Since you actually want to be able to live by it, your statement should be internally consistent (that is, not contradict itself or posit incompatible standards), somewhat comprehensive (celebrating the best of your past, anticipating future challenges), and it should give some indication of how you might prioritize the central values it brings up. Your statement should acknowledge and reflect the fact that your ethical life will involve engagements with a diverse array of people in a variety of circumstances. Take it as an opportunity for you to give your comprehensive ethical life vision a more concrete form.

Most people who write personal mission statements find that they can be a vital tool that can help you keep your priorities and core values in place when you face important decisions in your life. However, this fact should not lead you to develop writer's block. Remember, this is only your first personal mission statement. Since your values and commitments will evolve over time, you will need to rewrite your mission statement every so often. This project is an invitation to think seriously about your values and your priorities and to initiate a practice that will help you construct a life that you can—at any moment—reflect upon without regret and embrace as a life well lived.

RESOURCES AND OPTIONS

The most well-known guide to writing a personal mission statement can be found on pages 96–144 of Stephen Covey’s best-selling book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (Free Press, 1989). Christopher Gergen and Gregg Vanourek offer a similar project in their book *Life Entrepreneurs* (Jossey-Bass, 2008). If you don’t have access to these books or if you are more digitally inclined, you might want to work through the “mission statement builders” that you can find on the websites that are associated with these books:

<http://www.franklincovey.com/msb/>

<http://www.lifeentrepreneurs.com/>

You could also stimulate your thinking about these matters by writing a “This I Believe” essay. Back in the 1950s, Edward R. Murrow hosted a radio show that featured essays written by prominent personalities. Recently, National Public Radio revived this project and their efforts have greatly enhanced the collection of inspiring and insightful essays. If you want to try your hand at this, you should begin by listening to some of the online readings. Then read the “writer’s guide” (all of this can be found at: <http://thisibelieve.org/>). My only advice here would be that since you are doing this to enhance your personal mission statement, you will probably want to focus your essay on an ethical dimension of your life.

Your exploration of your core values might also be deepened by thinking about how you might respond to an “ethical life-story interview.” Begin by collecting a series of ethical episodes or vignettes from your life. These “critical events,” or “episodes,” or “scenes” should be selected because they were particularly influential in shaping your ethical character or in teaching you a particularly influential value. This exercise was inspired primarily by Dan P. McAdams’ instruments, “Guided Autobiography” and “Life Story Interview,” which you can find at the Foley Center for the Study of Lives (<http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/foley/instruments/>).

Here is a list of questions that might help you remember some of these key moments from your ethical life:

- What are some of your earliest ethical memories?
- What ethical realizations have you had that others find insightful?
- What are some of your ethical high moments? These will likely be moments of personal pride.
- What are some of your ethical low moments? These will likely be moments of personal shame.
- When did you stand by your principles? What did you learn from this?
- When did you abandon your principles? What did you learn from this?
- Morally, who do you admire or seek to emulate and what underlying values are revealed by that choice?
- Morally, who do you find repugnant and what underlying values are revealed by that fact?
- To what have you donated your time, energy, or money?
- What are some of the most important moral lessons that you learned from your parents?
- What conflicts have you had that have had a lasting influence over you?

- Are there any important turning points in your ethical life story?
- What events contributed most to your ethical growth?
- How have your religious or spiritual experiences influenced your moral development?
- What losses or traumatic experiences have you suffered and how have they influenced your moral development?
- What are the underlying values that guide your political affiliations?

This self-interview alone will probably raise a number of additional considerations that you might want to include in your personal mission statement. However, if you want to pursue it a bit further still, try to imagine your life as a novel. It has a setting, a cast of characters, and while it likely does not have a single coherent plot, it surely has a handful of main motifs. And notice this: YOU have the honor of being both the main character AND the author of this novel. As the author of your life, your goal is to develop or craft a future that realistically emerges out of your actual past. Of course, it would be unrealistic to propose an instant character transformation; gradual changes happen all the time. Furthermore, while no one can escape their past, we are all “response-able,” and thus we are free to choose many aspects of our future. Your mission—your story—could, after all, if you choose, be a story of growth and *change*.

GUEST AUTHOR

Nim Batchelor is a long-time Philosophy teacher at Elon University, where he has taught everything from Logic and Philosophy of Law to a course of his own creation called “Crafting a Life”, in which this exercise is featured.



GOING FARTHER #18

ETHICAL CHANGE PROJECTS

One of the prime lessons of this book is that all of us—very definitely including *you*—can and must think in bigger-than-usual ways about the difference that ethics can make. And again, I do not mean this in the stereotypical sense in which “getting ethics” might mean being a little more polite to strangers or the like—nothing against everyday kindness, of course, but there is a lot more to aspire to besides. Part I of this book affirmed the need to continuously think and rethink moral matters, and think for yourself when necessary, too. Part II encouraged you to orient your moral thinking and action more knowingly by ethical traditions, both ancient and modern, urgent and potentially radical as well. Part III began with a challenge to critical thinking and consistency, proceeded through dialogue and conflict-resolution skills, and ended by highlighting the need for creative rethinking in ethics, up to and including re-framing the usual problems themselves, ending with an appeal to moral vision.

We come in the end, then, to the last and largest **Going Farther** challenge in this book. Simply put, I challenge you to put all of these pieces together: to devise for yourself, or with your class, or organization, or group, some adventurous and ambitious project to make a constructive and perhaps decisive ethical difference in the larger world, and to begin to carry your project into action. More specifically, here is a list of some features, very briefly described, of the sorts of projects you could consider for ethical change work growing out of your engagement with this book.

(1) AN ETHICAL CHANGE PROJECT IS EXPLICITLY MOTIVATED BY MORAL VALUES

Justice, happiness, community, character—these and other moral values invite us to consider how we might make the world better. Your projects should be motivated by (some of) these; and you should be explicit—forthright, clear, and detailed—about your moral starting points.

We have seen from early on in this book that moral commitments do not have to be contentious ones. In fact, for the widest reach, we should appeal to common interests and avoid polarized moral “positions” that unnecessarily exclude values on the other side(s). So acknowledge values widely; find constructive ways to go forward *together*.

(2) AN ETHICAL CHANGE PROJECT USES AVAILABLE MEANS TO MAKE BIG AND SYNERGISTIC CHANGES

“Available means” means things within your power. But your power may be greater than you think. As members of a university community, for example, you have some influence

over that community's choices. As students you also have some natural links with students in other places and even around the world. Starting from such existing connections and communities is strategic: work from the places where you already have some leverage.

"Synergistic changes" means changes that achieve many connected and mutually supportive goals at once. For just one example, getting more seasonal and local foods into university dining halls would do many things at once: offer students a healthier diet, make us all more aware of the seasons and of what's happening on the land right here, greatly reduce transport costs (both in monetary terms and in terms of costs to the environment for fuel, air pollution, etc.), support local growers (so that the university begins to do more for the local community), and anticipate a "greener" economy in which radical localism may be necessary. Can you design your project so that its multiple effects also align with and further each other too?

(3) AN ETHICAL CHANGE PROJECT IS CONCERNED, AT LEAST IN PART, WITH STRUCTURAL CHANGES

By "structural" change I mean changes in the practices and institutions that underlie and often generate familiar moral problems—the kinds of changes urged upon ethics when we begin to think about "reframing problems" (chapter 13: recall also **Going Farther** #15, "Where Ethics Meets Politics"). Again, it is not enough to "band-aid" a problem, even if (to extend the metaphor) people are injured and genuinely do need band-aids among other things. As Martin Luther King Jr. famously said, a social system that produces beggars [itself] needs to be remade—not just nicer and better-staffed homeless shelters. Why are people homeless in the first place? Likewise, a production system that turns ever more of the natural world into trash needs more than better recycling programs. What *does* it need? Ah, that is now your question.

(4) AN ETHICAL CHANGE PROJECT REQUIRES DIALOGUE AND COLLABORATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

"Stakeholders" are affected or concerned people and communities both within and beyond your group or action community: people with a stake in the situation, and correspondingly, very likely, also a lot to offer as far as collaboration, expertise, and energy toward improving the situation.

It is crucial that the ethical involvement not be just one-way, as sometimes happens in "service" work. Change projects are not a matter of helping others out of pity or while maintaining a morally secure position ourselves. In the case of the homeless, contrariwise, whatever is done needs to be done *with* them rather than just *for* them. This is not only a means to a far more effective project, with far more engagement from others. It is also ethical, plain and simple, in the sense that it is premised on a fundamental equality and respect between all of the people involved.

(5) AN ETHICAL CHANGE PROJECT IS MAXIMALLY CREATIVE AND VISIONARY

Far more wonderful ethical work is possible than we usually think! It's only that some training and some methods are necessary to engage serious creativity. Exaggerate and extrapolate starting-point ideas; learn to invite exotic associations; always ask "what's the next step?" before settling down on some halfway-creative idea; look for the "give behind the givens" when problems seem fixed and intractable. This book has offered a wide range of possible examples, from projects that my own students have carried out over the years to all manner of inventive projects envisioned and carried out by others. Now, though, the ball really is entirely in your hands. You must find your own way forward. Take your toolbox—all of it, but especially these most ambitious parts—and go out and use it. Good luck!

ENDNOTES



Teaching Like a Pragmatist

Previous editions of this book included extensive notes on pedagogy in general as well as advice for teaching each chapter. This time around, on the advice of reviewers, I have pared all of this back substantially. As several commentators have put it, mostly the pedagogy is built into the text already. Instead, here at the end, I offer only a much shorter set of notes, broadly viewing course pedagogy from a Pragmatic (in the philosophical sense) point of view, but in teacher- and philosopher-directed ways that don't fit readily into the text proper.

COURSE DESIGN WITH *TOOLBOX*

This book is designed to serve as the chief or sole textbook in a college or high-level high school ethics course, though it can be supplemented in a variety of ways too, and could well serve as a supplement itself. Some may wish to supplement it with a standard text, like a collection of readings from traditional ethical theories, or a collection of more professional articles on “applied” themes, or a text that combines both. Others may supplement it in quite different ways: say, with books that go into depth on a single issue raised here more briefly. Some colleagues have used *Toolbox* successfully with Jonathan Saffran Foer's book *Eating Animals* (from which you'll recall there is a selection in **Going Farther** #11) or coupled it with popular and provocative books such as Daniel Quinn's *Ishmael*. I have also used *Toolbox* as the first of several main texts in mid- or upper-level practical ethics courses such as Environmental Ethics and Ethics and Decision-Making—since we can certainly use a good toolbox in approaching such topics!

In general, as I say in the Preface, my aim has been to allow what is now called “flipping the classroom” (which, I'd like to just crankily note, was actually an idea promoted by John Dewey some 125 years ago, but never mind) by making it possible for actual class meetings to be largely active application, rather than the presentation or explication of “content.” I may briefly explain or review key points of the text at the beginning of the class, or of some in-class exercise, but the key pedagogical move is to set up exercises and scenarios that

call upon and develop the skills in question by the very way they are designed to unfold and engage students. (For more on this general approach to teaching, see my article “From Guide on the Side to Impresario with a Scenario,” *College Teaching* 63 (2015): 99–104. www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/87567555.2015.1014993#abstract.) Of course this book can be (and often is) used with a more standard lecture-based pedagogy as well.

As the Preface also points out, the various chapters and parts can be used in a variety of different sequences. Some chapters do belong together and in a certain order: Chapters 4 through 8, for instance. Still, for the most part, the chapters remain largely independent and non-sequential. Notably also, the whole of Part III—the skills—can be also introduced before Part II—the families and theories, if so desired. Many of my colleagues use the dialogue chapter near the beginning of their classes to help set ground rules for class discussions. In my own current teaching I use the chapters out of book order too, largely because my courses increasingly are built around Ethical Change Projects (framed by **Going Farther** #18; Chapter 14 comes early in this design as well). Thus I may begin with a skeleton of skills and topics—last time it was Chapters 1, 2, 11, and 12, for example, along with **Going Farther** #13 and #18—to help the class begin to select and plan their own service or change projects; then we work more slowly and sometimes selectively through the rest as the work gets underway.

PAPER ASSIGNMENTS

For short writing assignments I suggest drawing upon the exercises that conclude each chapter, with the strategic addition or substitution of **Going Farther** exercises when appropriate. The exercises ask for a variety of responses: for self-reflections, for critiques or extensions of the ideas in the text, or other and quite different projects. All aim to give students a strong start and some good support, drawing on the material in the chapter in focused and practical ways.

I am no longer much inclined to assign freestanding writing of any length, like the usual term paper. It’s certainly true that writing such papers may be one way in which students can display some of the skills they are learning. But papers are not the only way, and often may well not be the best way. I’m more inclined toward practical projects, actually trying to make an ethical difference. Of course this kind of work can be coupled with writing, and a lot of it. One of my requirements with all of my classes’ projects, in fact, is that students produce an explicit and detailed ethical rationale, posting it online, for example, if they put up a website. The last one was an introduction to an Ethical Cookbook! But these writings are not academic papers in the usual sense. They are usually written by groups rather than individuals; they are public rather than read solely by their professor; they are part of larger

projects with multiple stakeholders who will also weigh in; and the usual academic voice is therefore often out of place, if not inappropriate. This kind of writing is certainly rigorous and demanding in its own way, and is also, in my view, much better preparation for the collaborative and community-oriented ethical work students are likely to undertake in their lives after university, or even outside classes while still students.

When I do assign longer academic papers, I emphasize that a wide variety of writing styles are possible. Too often, we, and correspondingly our students, assume that only papers in an argumentative style are appropriate in philosophy. Once again, certainly it is important to train students to write in this style. It asks a vital kind of rigor and clear thinking, and is one style of contributing to public debate. Yet just as certainly it is not the only kind of effective and appropriate writing. Much of the writing in this book is—quite on purpose—in very different styles. Alice Walker’s “Am I Blue?” and the excerpt by Ted Kerasote in **Going Farther #2**, for example, offer contrasting models both to each other and to the usual academic writing. There are narratives, like Rayna Rapp’s abortion story (Reading #7) and Ta-Nehisi Coates’s (Reading #12); there is Aldo Leopold’s classic exposition of “The Land Ethic” (Reading #20); there are Ursula LeGuin’s case for sending grannies to the stars (Reading #33), personal testimonies like Danusha Goska’s (Reading #35), and many other models as well. Students may find it useful to compare and contrast some of these essays specifically with attention to the authors’ aims and writing strategies. Then they will be in a much better position to appreciate the expectations for the writing they will be doing themselves.

As to the mechanics—especially but not exclusively for the usual sorts of academic papers—some of my other books offer some guidance. *A Rulebook for Arguments* (Hackett Publishing Company, many editions) offers rules for argumentative papers of any sort. The last chapter of *A Practical Companion to Ethics* (Oxford University Press, 4th edition, 2011), includes a box on writing papers in ethics, specifically asking students to start planning their paper by asking what is their aim with it. Explore an issue? Witness? Get some problem unstuck? Make a case? Take a stand? Each aim suggests and requires a quite different kind of writing.

A LITTLE MORE PRAGMATISM

On the whole, apart from the short excerpt from Margaret Urban Walker in Reading #2 and some comments at the beginning of Chapters 12 and 13, this book does not defend or even highlight its pragmatic starting points—though it’s been difficult to resist!—nor critique the usual ones. A textbook is not the place for methodological debates (and of course it’s not exactly as though traditional textbooks spend their time laying out and defending their presuppositions either, do they?). Mostly I simply *do* ethics in a pragmatic way, as if

it were the most natural thing in the world—which of course it *is*, in my view, though rarely in the tradition's. Interested or provoked readers might consult my book *Toward Better Problems* (Temple University Press, 1992) for a development and defense of some of my assumptions. A useful overview of Dewey's approach can be found in James Gouinlock's collection *The Moral Writings of John Dewey* (Prometheus, 1994). Here I want to offer just a few more basic points, expanding a bit on my introduction to the Walker reading.

Many philosophers prefer to concentrate on ethics' unique intellectual challenges—on theory-building and conceptual analysis—following a model of ethics essentially laid down (as Walker usefully reminds us) by the English philosopher Henry Sidgwick in the late 19th century. In my view, however, while this essentially professional model of ethics may (sometimes) be appropriate in upper-level classes mostly for majors or where some specialization is necessary, it is not the best approach in lower-level, introductory, general-curriculum ethics courses, in which very few if any students intend to become specialists in ethics. It seems to me that we are missing an opportunity to offer them—and, just possibly, ourselves—a much more useful and engaged model of ethics.

Students in such classes, like most people, come to ethics to learn how to *live*. This is a far broader matter—not merely or mainly an intellectual challenge, but a challenge to the imagination and to the heart too, and to our all-around skill as effective moral citizens. It may be that by concentrating on certain intellectual challenges unique to ethics, we slight the practical skills that are vital to ethics but *not* unique to it. So part of the aim of this book is to rejoin ethics to life skills—to put ethics into what I see as its rightful place.

For one thing, pragmatism shifts emphasis away from moral judgment. This is often almost incomprehensible to moral philosophers as well as many everyday moralists, for whom the very point of ethics is to judge actions—to deliver ethical verdicts. Ethical problems on the traditional view are a kind of puzzle that needs to be solved. But pragmatism points in another direction. The real point of ethics, on a pragmatic view, is to actually improve the world: to apply intelligence in a constructive way in what Dewey called "problematic situations," much broader and vaguer regions of tension and uncertainty, and to let the results feed back to revise our practice and theories as needed.

For pragmatism, then, ethics is essentially practical, but not mainly or merely in the familiar sense that it issues in practical judgments, but also and fundamentally in the sense that it takes up practical problems of value from a reconstructive or even experimental point of view. Often this reconstruction is also essentially social. For example, for the philosophical tradition, "the" question of assisted suicide calls for judgment of what a dying person can justly ask—nothing to do with us, apparently—while for pragmatism a better question is how we—society in general, or a sick or dying person's community, and even I personally—can respond to that person's situation. Less judgment, more *engagement*.

Ethical values are diverse and plural; ethical practice therefore also requires a variety of tools. Theories are only one such tool (a useful way of expressing or connecting the families of values) but are also apt to get out of hand and claim the whole show for themselves. Again, ethics *also* needs critical thinking; it needs expressive and creative skills; and it calls upon the abilities to connect and stay connected with others and to create and sustain community, moral vision, and inspiration.

It's a striking thing, though, that despite the current challenges to "ethics as usual," it remains virtually impossible to teach practical ethics without plowing the same old theoretical furrows. There are vanishingly few textbooks, and none besides this one, I believe, from major publishers, that systematically present ethics in a pragmatic key. My main aim, then, has just been to write such a book—to make it possible to teach ethics on the view laid out in this book's Preface: as a collection of practical skills that enable us to make a constructive difference in problematic ethical situations. Task enough for one book.

Finally, though, I do admit that I hope that *A 21st Century Ethical Toolbox* will be read as a contribution—albeit oblique—to the philosophical debate about the foundations of ethics too. Every approach to ethics must be judged partly by how it looks in action: by what kinds of tools it brings back to practice, by how constructively and invitingly it enables us to contribute to improving our common life. Could (must?) not each then be judged in part by what kinds of introductory texts and courses it makes possible—by what an introduction to ethics done that way leaves students able to do? A good pragmatic maxim is that proof is partly in the pudding. I am proud to offer this book as one relevant kind of pudding.

RELATIVISM AS BUGBEAR

Chapter 2 identifies some sorts of moves that often can "short-circuit" ethical thinking before it even gets started, relativism being probably the most tempting of these. Generally, though, I do not tackle any of these "short-circuits" head-on in class. Here, as in general, I hope that the text is enough already. We don't want to drive people into defensiveness. And we don't need to. It is striking, for example, that although the specter of relativism seems to loom extremely large for some ethics instructors—and, it seems, just about all ethics textbook writers—it vanishes into thin air the minute a real issue comes on the scene. Nobody says things like, "It's wrong to execute innocent prisoners in Oregon but maybe is right in Texas." Despite the veneer of relativism, most of us come with strong moral opinions, and reasons for them too. Dogmatism is the more real danger.

Of course students do express relativistic sentiments from time to time (like "Who am I to say?"). Still, I think that philosophers read too much of a

theory—Relativism with a capital R—into them. Maybe when students ask “Who am I to say?” they are just trying to give others some space—and asking for space themselves, in a context where they are unsure of themselves. After all, college is a time of change and experiment for many people. Things are in flux; they justly want room to move. Maybe they want some freedom from the moral deliverances of others, time to work things out on their own. This is not unreasonable—and it has nothing to do with the philosophical debate about relativism. I don’t think it is wise to take a few relativistic-sounding expressions as on the way to relativism, as it were, and then try to lay out the whole capital-R theory and defeat it. It may actually *make* students relativists, for one thing—if they’re persuaded by this that philosophical relativism is the only way to defend the personal space they genuinely do need—and then it *will* be a problem.

Besides, even if they really are (philosophical) relativists from the beginning, surely it is unwise pedagogically as well as personally to suppose that we must begin a course by “defeating” something students are supposed to believe so strongly. Wiser and more effective would be to take them where they are and build from there. How inviting is ethics likely to be if it sets itself up from the start as a furious (and, to be honest, somewhat desperate) assault on their supposed basic convictions? Aim to show them instead, by example, how much careful thinking and constructive engagement is possible in ethics after all.

So my practice is to just tolerate the occasional “Who is to say?” rhetoric without wheeling out the heavy artillery. I just point out that we do in fact have more to think about and, actually, a lot to say. I send the harder-core relativists to the box called “Relativism: Philosophical Questions” near the end of Chapter 2. We get a lot more space for the real work of ethics.

A LITTLE MORE ON REFRAMING PROBLEMS

Certain possibly puzzling moves in *Toolbox* may become clearer and, I hope, more persuasive if viewed against a broadly pragmatic background. In particular, I want to add a bit more about my treatment of the Heinz dilemma in Chapter 13 and **Going Farther** #15, as this also goes to the very heart of how creativity in ethics might be reconceived.

Ethical philosophers typically use the Kohlberg dilemmas to illustrate the divergence and conflict between utilitarian and deontological theories. And of course if that is your interest in the dilemmas, you can alter them in various ways to close off the possibility of other alternatives. I have even seen ethics textbooks in which students aren’t considered to have understood an issue until they identify “the” dilemma that is supposed to lie at the root of it, and more than one reviewer has complained about my treatment of the Heinz dilemma, concluding that I myself “don’t really understand what

ethics is,” since I too, like many of the moral psychologists’ female subjects, am more interested in heading off the dilemma than “solving” it.

I humbly submit that this line of objection begs the question. It makes ethical problems into dilemmas by fiat: it simply *builds in* the assumption that dilemmas are, after all, what we typically face. But are they? How can we know, without creatively seeking alternatives? How could practical creativity—meeting such practical problems with full-scale inventiveness and practical light-footedness—not be at least one key skill in ethics?

Welcoming creativity, though, requires different attitudes from the start, as I have tried to show; and I hope it is also evident from Chapter 13 that many alleged dilemmas actually can be resolved or at least constructively reframed. Here, by way of closing, we might launch a little philosophical counter-offensive of our own and challenge the usual philosophical construction of the Heinz dilemma right down to its core. The supposed dilemma between utilitarianism and deontological ethics itself has come into some question, even theoretically; but even if these theories do conflict, one *could* construe their conflict as another practical creative challenge—to so design social institutions that these different sets of values seldom or only harmlessly conflict in practice. That is, why take even the utilitarianism-versus-deontology conflict as a given? Today, I know, whole subfields of professional philosophical ethics are built around this supposedly fundamental divide. But this is not, to put it mildly, necessarily the best idea. Surely, at the very least, such an approach is not entitled to claim with no further ado that it alone constitutes ethics.

Professor David Schmidtz tells a striking story that makes a similar point about another standard case in “dilemma ethics,” the so-called Trolley Problem:

A trolley is rolling down a track on its way to killing five people. If you switch to another track on which there is only one person, you will save five and kill one.

Schmidtz writes:

When I presented the Trolley case and asked audiences whether they would switch tracks, most would say, “There has to be another way!” On a trip to Kazakhstan, I presented the case to an audience of twenty-one professors from nine post-Soviet republics, and they said the same thing. I responded as I always did, saying, “Please, stay on topic. I’m trying to illustrate a point here. To see the point, you need to decide what to do when there is no other way.” When I said this to my class of post-Soviet professors, though, they responded in a way no audience of mine ever had. They spoke briefly among themselves in Russian, then two of them quietly said (as others nodded, every one of them looking me straight in the eye), “Yes, we understand. We have heard this before. All our lives we were told the few must be sacrificed for the sake of many. We were told there is no other way. What we were told was a lie. There was always another way.”

They were right. The real world does not stipulate that there is no other way. We are not to sacrifice one person for the sake of another. If we find ourselves seemingly called upon to sacrifice the few for the sake of the many, *justice is about finding another way.**

I argue with Schmidtz that the task in such cases is not to simply accept whatever situations the world supposedly throws up to us, as if they themselves did not already reflect debatable ideas about ethics and ethical problems, but to seriously question and rethink the nature and presuppositions of the supposed problems themselves. Insisting on the familiar old problems, framed in the familiar old ways, for the familiar old reasons, no longer necessarily should carry the day. What if, in *general*, “justice is about finding another way”? Shouldn’t we be getting on with it?

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

In the end, then, both pedagogically and philosophically, the challenge comes back to actually making a difference—a big difference, if we can, what **Going Farther** #18 labels a *structural* change—but at least something constructive and as ambitious as it can be. Ultimately, part of the task of a pragmatically inspired ethics class is to enable students, as well as the class as a whole as a temporary moral community, to become ethical change-makers themselves.

Note that Ethical Change Projects are quite different from “service” or “service learning” as usually conceived. Service is helping: dealing with immediate need by offering aid and succor. Of course this is a vital task. Again, though, it also leaves the root causes of need or suffering unaddressed. Structural change-making hopes to go deeper, to address the causes of need themselves, or to promote changes that offer all of us opportunities for ethical transformation and better understanding.

My own students, lately, have initiated such projects as making our own school more connected and responsive on issues of race—both working to make race issues more prominent and consistent in the curriculum and forging links between the university and communities of color in our own community—literally down the street—and region. A recent class produced and distributed an ethical cookbook for other students such as themselves, sharing the knowledge of food options that they themselves had only recently gained, and aiming to advance a new moral vision around food issues, bringing values like health, a regenerative local farm practice, and addressing food insecurity into better practical congruence. Yet another made it a project to institute biweekly meals at the university’s cafeterias with all locally grown, seasonal, and organic food, learning ourselves and then helping to educate

*David Schmidtz and Elizabeth Willott, editors, *Environmental Ethics: What Really Matters, What Really Works* [Oxford University Press, 2011], p. xxii. My emphasis.

other students, staff, and food service personnel about alternative agriculture and diets and creating ongoing connections between the university and local suppliers—indeed, using the considerable buying power of the university to help reshape local markets.

One of my colleagues' classes partners with students at other and very different institutions to jointly further the work of Greensboro's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (discussed in chapter 11) from the student side. Another group constructed a website for local teens to get them sex-education information they were being denied in their own schools, along with local resources and help designed to promote sexual response-ability, and then handed the site off to local high-schoolers themselves.

You can find yet more examples of this sort of work at a number of fine websites such as <http://www.engagedphilosophy.com/>—their "Resources" link is also very helpful.

This kind of class, I find, is always a bit of a whirlwind, but it is also immensely invigorating, and the projects become great learning experiences for me as well as the students. And it manifestly sets some wheels of change moving. One of my colleagues' Environmental Ethics classes started Elon's community garden project, subsequently picked up by a class of mine, and it is still going strong a dozen years later, now also linking in the families of local disadvantaged high-schoolers in on-campus enrichment and college-prep classes during the summer. So many students were interested that Environmental Studies launched a gardening class. Since then, leaping beyond the garden in turn, we have been able to add a whole farm out on the edge of campus, with high-tunnel greenhouse, beehives, and so much production that it goes *en masse* to the Campus Kitchen to help produce the 200 or so meals a week that Elon sends to local soup kitchens. Students who have worked on the farm head into the Peace Corps after graduation, or start local CSA (Community-Supported Agriculture) farms. Who would have thought?

Small but still ambitious initiatives, in short, can make an out-of-scale and continuing difference over time. So what difference will the next class—yours, maybe—make?



Key Terms in This Book

Here is a list of key terms and phrases used in this book. The page numbers cited for each term or phrase are normally for its first introduction and explanation, with other pages added only when the main explanation occurs later. Cross-references to other terms in this listing are in bold.

For major ethical issues discussed, see the next section.

“All my relations”

A Lakota (Sioux) ceremonial phrase affirming the interrelatedness of everything on Earth (page 258). See also **Interbeing**.

Analogies, constructed

Invented “like cases” used to test or advocate for moral views about a difficult or contentious case (page 335).

Basic needs

The conditions all of us need to survive and to have some chance to flourish, such as food, shelter, education, freedom. **Ethics** is, in part, **taking care** for such needs of others as well as ourselves (page 6).

Care ethics

A form of the **Ethics of Relationship** putting special emphasis on personal and familial relationships such as those between intimate partners, parents and children, friends, and comrades (page 245).

Categorical imperative

Kant’s fundamental principle of ethics: “Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.” According to Kant, this is the same principle as “Always act so as to treat humanity, whether in yourself or in another, as an end and never merely as a means” (page 138–139).

Common ground

Shared starting-points in ethical thinking; broad regions of agreement that are the often unnoticed background to points of disagreement (page 374, Reading #29).

Communicative ethics, or Discourse ethics

An approach to ethics, broadly in the **Ethics of Persons** family, that takes dialogue as a fundamental model and expression of ethical relations (page 385, Reading #30).

Community

A linked set of people who have some compelling commonality. Aldo Leopold and others argue that “community” in this sense goes far beyond the human world as well (page 252, Reading #20).

Congruence, bringing values into

When moral values seem to be in tension or opposition, seeking to honor what is right about all of them, rather than rejecting or trying to decide between them. Values may be brought into congruence by compromise, working from compatible values, seeking common ground, and dovetailing values (page 407).

Consistency

Judging morally similar situations in similar ways (Chapter 10).” See **Golden Rule** and **Judging like cases alike**.

Creativity

The art of expanding possibility; the ability to cast a situation or challenge or problem in a new light and thereby open up possibilities in it that were not evident before (page 430).

Critical thinking

Mindfulness about evidence, inference, and sources (page xiv, Chapter 9).

Deontology

A broad category of **ethical theories** or **moral values** that locate moral value in something other than the consequences of actions or in the virtues of character; often defined as an ethics of *duty*, or the claim that ethics should concern the rightness or wrongness of acts themselves (vs. their results or the actor) (page 157–158).

Environmental ethics

The extension of moral value to, or recognition of moral value in, the natural world (page 258, Readings #20 and #22).

Essence

Those characteristics that fundamentally make something what it is. For Aristotle, essences are captured by definitions; thus, humans are defined as “rational animals” (page 217).

Ethical disengagement

In this book, a specific form of ethical “short-circuit” (see **Short-circuit, ethical**) that rejects ethical thinking as too vague and pliable and instead proposes to “just follow the law” or some other method of “value-free” decision-making (page 56).

Ethical theory

The project of trying to systematize **moral values** in increasingly rigorous ways, at least into broad families with distinctive internal logics, and ideally the end into a single system (page 8).

Ethics

Taking care for the **basic needs** and **legitimate expectations** of others as well as our own (page 3–7).

Ethics of Happiness

The **family of moral values** concerned to increase the balance of **happiness** over suffering, especially in society as a whole (Chapter 6). See also **Utilitarianism**.

Ethics of the Person

The **family of moral values** that affirm that **persons** are special and precious and have a dignity that demands respect (Chapter 5).

Ethics of Relationship

The **family of moral values** concerned with our connections to others, from families to larger human and more-than-human **communities** (Chapter 8).

Ethics of Virtue

The **family of moral values** concerned with a person's character (Chapter 7).

Expanding circle

The perception that the ambit or “circle” of **ethics** is increasing, and in particular that at least some other animals now are and should be encompassed in serious moral consideration (page 258).

Family of moral values

Large groupings of **moral values** around certain shared key ideas or themes (page 104).

Feminist ethics

Forms of ethics that aim to re-value traditionally de-valued realms identified with women, especially children and family, while at the same time to free women from being restricted to and by them (page 28).

Golden Rule

In Jesus's words, “Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:31, NIV). Philosopher Harry Gensler holds that the Golden Rule is “properly understood [as] a consistency principle” (page 327)—a way of leveraging ourselves into **judging like cases alike**. See also **Consistency** and **Role reversal**.

Great Law of the Iroquois Confederacy

Enjoins us to **take care** for future generations all the way out to our great-great-grandchildren, or the **seventh generation** (page 4).

Happiness

Positive states of mind: pleasure, well-being, satisfaction. See also **Ethics of Happiness** (Chapter 6).

I/Thou relationship

Martin Buber's conception of a kind of relationship or moment in which **persons** are fully present to each other (page 127).

Image of God/"Imago Dei"

A conception of the human **person** as a reflection of God's personhood, and therefore as infinitely precious (page 128).

Interbeing

The Vietnamese Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh's phrase for the interrelation of all beings (page 259).

Judging like cases alike

Being sure that we draw the same moral conclusions about **like cases** or even constructed analogies (see **Analogies, constructed**) that we draw about the case that first confronts us and in which we actually may have only one particular role (Chapter 10). See also **Consistency**, **Role reversal**, and **Golden Rule**.

Land ethic

The philosopher-forester Aldo Leopold's proposal to bring ecosystems into moral consideration. "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community" (page 260, 264).

Legitimate expectations

Actions or provisions we are entitled to expect of others, either "positive," like the power to vote or access to health care, or "negative," like freedom from coercion or physical threats (page 6).

Like cases

Situations, real or invented, that are similar in morally relevant ways to a situation we are trying to think through or judge consistently (Chapter 10). See **Judging like cases alike**.

Loaded language

Language that evokes strong or otherwise tinged feelings that predetermine a moral answer; arguments that work chiefly by the overtones of the words rather than offering good reasons (page 312–313).

Moral and morality

Sometimes, values or behaviors that are embraced out of custom or habit, rather than being more reflective or systematic. Anthropologists speak of "mores" in this sense. This book mostly speaks of moral *values* but of ethical *issues* or *debates* or *problems* (page 7).

Moral vision

A picture of a morally better alternative *world*—re-envisioned as a whole—that is idealistic and inviting to all, **bringing values into congruence** (Chapter 14).

Objectification

Treating someone or something purely as a means to some other ends; treating a person as "just an object" (page 160).

Offhand self-justification

Automatic excuse-making or self-justification, rather than thinking through a challenging question on its merits (page 45).

Person

Traditionally, a human individual with certain traits such as self-awareness and reason that are claimed to be the basis for special consideration and value. Today it is a contested question whether only a human being can be a person, or that the person-making style of consciousness must be primarily based upon reason (Chapter 5).

Pragmatism

An American philosophical school emphasizing practical effectiveness as the test of ethical and other philosophical ways of thinking (page 28–29).

Psychological egoism

The claim that everything or nearly everything that people do ultimately traces back to self-interest (page 46).

Reframing problems

Rethinking and transforming “the” supposed problem itself, rather than just trying to solve it in the terms in which it is presented to us (page 442).

Relativism

The view that there are no universal or objective moral values, emphasizing instead the great diversity of moral values that people actually have held and hold, and therefore concluding that there is no genuine solid basis for moral argument (page 51–56).

Religious ethics

Ethics framed within the religious traditions, invoking divine sanction, the words and deeds of prophetic people, and/or the experience of spiritual awe and wonder (Chapter 3).

Response-ability

The ability to choose our responses to things. More specifically, the capacity to observe our own habits of responsiveness and then to rethink them and change them as necessary (page 233, 511).

Rights

Principles of freedom or entitlement that create a space for an individual’s action, subject to the limitations of others’ similar freedom or entitlement (page 142).

Role reversal

Testing whether you are **judging like cases alike** by imagining roles reversed in a situation. Do you draw the same moral conclusion, or not? See **Consistency** (pages 327, 333).

Selfishness and self-interest

See **Psychological egoism**.

Seventh generation

Specifically focusing our ethical consideration for the future by holding in mind our great-great-great-grandchildren. Alternatively, specifically placing ourselves within a larger **Ethics of Relationship** by holding in mind the three generations in both directions from us, stationing ourselves in the middle (page 4, 265).

Shareable terms

Terms and concepts that express moral values and reference-points common across different ethical traditions and/or between religious and secular ethics (page 76).

Short-circuits, ethical

Moves in the face of ethical problems or in ethical discussions that block or disable real thinking, such as **offhand self-justification** and dogmatism (Chapter 2).

Sustaining arguments

“Arguments which matter, about things which matter, with people who matter to each other.” (Martin Fowler) (Page 306, Reading #23.)

Taking care

Paying attention to the **basic needs** and **legitimate expectations** of others as well as our own; being conscientious about them; and/or trying to meet them (page 3–7).

Utilitarianism

A form of the **Ethics of Happiness** which takes the greatest balance of **happiness** over unhappiness, in society as a whole, as the ultimate moral criterion (page 183).

Values

Those things we care about, that matter to us; those goals and ideals we aspire to and measure ourselves and our society by (page 97).

Vice

The opposite of a **virtue** (page 215).

Virtue

A trait or disposition that is morally valued, and that together with other valued traits or dispositions forms our moral character (Chapter 3). See also **Ethics of Virtue**.

Work ethic

A system of values, both moral and non-moral, concerned with work, and traditionally promoting hard work, and a lot of it (page 107).



Major Ethical Issues Discussed

A 21st Century Ethical Toolbox discusses innumerable ethical issues. Many of these are listed in the index. Sometimes these discussions are brief and only occur in one or two places. Some other ethical issues, though, come up repeatedly and are treated at some length, but not always in just one place, since this book is organized not around issues but around practical and conceptual tools and skills. The same issue may be discussed from different angles in different chapters. Consequently, some recent reviewers suggested a listing of major issues discussed along with references to the different parts of this book's treatment of them, with a brief annotation, to make locating and relating all of those parts easier for issue-oriented users. I appreciate the suggestion; the guide that follows is the result.

ABORTION

Going Farther #4 is mostly Rayna Rapp's abortion story, illustrating "how varied, complex, and personal are the factors surrounding reproductive choice, and . . . the suffering that results when choice is denied." The challenge there is to attend to the *many* values and types of values that lie in the background of this issue. The reading from *Search for Common Ground* (chapter 11, Reading # 29) illustrates and explains some conditions for dialogue on this issue. Judith Thomson's violinist analogy, arguing for a right to choose abortion, is introduced on pages 336. **Going Farther #14** raises the question of reframing the whole issue. See also pages 152, 413–414, 463 (about RU-486), and Exercise 15.2.

AGING AND THE AGED

The issue of our society's treatment of the aged is first raised on pages 446–447, in the context of creative rethinking. The two readings on moral vision in chapter 14 (readings #32 [Thomas, selections from *What Are Old People For?*] and #33 [LeGuin, "The Space Crone"])] focus on it, along with the introduction to those readings starting on page 477.

ANIMALS (OTHER THAN HUMAN)

Going Farther #1, with readings #3 (Walker, “Am I Blue?”) and #4 (Kerasote, selections from *Bloodties*), raises the question of eating and hunting other animals early in the book. Question #5 in Exercises 5.2, 6.2, 7.2, and 8.2 raises the general issue of the human relation to other animals from the point of view of each of the four families of values. Each repetition of the question adds some new information or thought probes. On whether and how other animals can be “persons,” see page 152. In **Going Farther #11**, readings #26 (Foer, “A Case for Eating Dogs”) and #27 (Southan, “The Vegans Have Landed”) pose some major challenges to everyone’s consistency on this issue. Chapter 11 on Dialogue opens with a sample dialogue on the treatment of animals (page 368), and Reading #31 (Gottlieb, “Can We Talk?”) follows up with a reflection on “understanding the other side in the animal rights debate.” See pages 467–469 for some imaginative explorations of meat-free diets.

ASSISTED SUICIDE

Assisted suicide is not discussed in detail but does enter the text a number of times as an example, notably on pages 404–405, 408–409, and 442.

BIOETHICS

Going Farther #15 takes up several bioethical issues, such as the **Heinz dilemma** and the **health insurance** debate, to illustrate the ways in which political decisions and social practices shape many ethical issues—also therefore the degree to which those issues may sometimes be dramatically re-framed, headed off, or even unexpectedly resolved. Other bioethical issues arise throughout the text, such as **abortion**, **assisted suicide**, and the Schiavo case (pages 388, 433–434).

CHILDREN'S LIBERATION

See **Going Farther #12**/ Reading #28 (Glaser, “Beyond Adulthood”).

CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate change is the focus in **Going Farther #3** / Reading #5 (Solnit, “By the Way, Your Home Is on Fire”) and again arises in **Going Farther #16**/ Reading #34 (McDonough, “Design for a New World”). See also question #6

in Exercises 5.2, 6.2, 7.2, and 8.2, which raises the issue of climate change from the point of view of each of the four families of values. Each repetition of the question adds some new information or thought probes. See also page 300, 302 and **Future generations, justice to**.

DEATH PENALTY (CAPITAL PUNISHMENT)

Chapter 9, pages 296 and 305, introduces some of the underlying factual issues. Exercise 12.3 invites students to apply a congruence approach to the underlying values. Exercise 13.3 includes an item inviting students to apply a creative approach to the question. See also page 494.

DIALOGUE

Chapter 11 and its readings are all about dialogue. Additional “dysfunctional dialogues” are offered for critical analysis and reconstruction in Exercise 2.3. See also Reading #31 (Gottlieb, “Can We Talk?”).

DISTRIBUTION OF WEALTH

Question #4 in Exercises 5.2, 6.2, 7.2, and 8.2 raises the issue of the distribution of wealth from the point of view of each of the four families of values. Each repetition of the question adds some new information or thought probes. In the middle of these comes **Going Farther #7**, elaborating on theories of justice, and **Going Farther #8**, which takes up the closely-related question of ethics and **Poverty**.

DRUGS

Exercise 1.2 includes an item first raising the question of drugs. Question #4 in Exercises 5.2, 6.2, 7.2, and 8.2 raises the issue of drugs from the point of view of each of the four families of values. Each repetition of the question adds some new information or thought probes. The issue arises later in the book in the context of minding the evidence (pages 303–304) and creative alternatives (page 443).

ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS

The question of values beyond the human sphere arises early in this book with the issue of other animals (see **Animals (other than human)**).

Typically, though, *environmental* ethics is understood to focus on the moral values of the natural world more broadly, including mountains, rivers, ecosystems, and the Earth as a whole. Chapter 8's Reading #21 (Leopold, "The Land Ethic") famously proposes that "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community" (page 264). **Going Farther** #10 / Reading #22 (Abbey, "The Great American Desert") indeed goes farther to consider "values on the edge": are (some?) environmental values beyond any of the familiar families of values featured in this book—and if so, what then? Chapter 3 considers environmental values from a religious perspective, especially as articulated in Pope Francis's recent encyclical *Laudato si'* (pages 76–78 and 94). Environmental ethics can be visionary (pages 472–476, and Reading #34 [McDonough, "Design for a New World"]). See also **Sustainability**.

ETHICAL THEORY

This book acknowledges the project of ethical theory early on (pages 8) and draws on it in a limited way in introducing the idea of families of moral values (page 104). On the other hand, **Going Farther** #1 and its Reading #2 (Walker, from "Moral Understandings") question the more rigorous and insistent project of systematizing and theorizing moral values, at least from a practical point of view. There is further discussion along these lines in the notes for teachers ("Teaching Like a Pragmatist," pages 554–555). Many of the "Complications" sections that close each of the chapters on the families of moral value also raise issues related to the general project of ethical theory. **Going Farther** #10 / Reading #22 (Abbey, "The Great American Desert") goes farther to consider "values on the edge." Are (some?) environmental values beyond any contemporary ethical theories—and if so, what then?

FUTURE GENERATIONS, JUSTICE TO

Almost the first example of ethical consideration in this book is the "Great Law of the Iroquois," enjoining us to take care for future generations all the way out to our great-great-great-grandchildren, or the seventh generation (pages 4, 265). Reading #25 (Routleys, "The Nuclear Train to the Future") raises it again in the context of judging like cases alike. **Going Farther** #16 / Reading #34 (McDonough, "Design for a New World") frames it as a design challenge—and one we can meet. See also **Climate change** and **Sustainability**.

GAMBLING (LOTTERY)

Exercise 4.4 uses the question of a state lottery as an example to illustrate "mapping" the values at stake in ethical debates.

GAY RIGHTS

Traditional attitudes toward homosexuality are discussed in chapter 3, “Ethics and Religion,” pages 80–83. On bringing values into better congruence on this issue, see pages 533–534.

HEALTH INSURANCE

Going Farther #15 frames the health insurance issue in ethical terms. Discussions of the **Heinz dilemma** that run through the later part of the book add critical tools, for example pages 458–460.

HEINZ DILEMMA (KOHLEBERG)

The dilemma is introduced on pages 431–433 with some alternative possibilities considered on pages 435–436. See also pages 443–444, 458–460, and 556–558.

JUSTICE

Going Farther #7, immediately following the chapters on the Ethics of the Person and The Ethics of Happiness, introduces some of the prominent contemporary theories of justice and the debates between them. Problems of justice from utilitarian point of view are discussed on pages 194–196. Exercise 10.2 poses the question of justice in the context of the welfare debate and “Golden Rule” arguments in particular. See also **Future generations, justice to.**

PERSONS AND PERSONHOOD

The concept of personhood is key to any Ethics of the Person. Chapter 5 surveys a variety of ways of understanding personhood, from direct encounter in “I/Thou” relations, the “Imago Dei,” and Kant’s conception of the rational self-lawgiver. The “Complications” section of that chapter sketches some of the challenges of actually defining “person” (pages 151–152). The question consistently arises around **Animals (other than human)**: see, for example, pages 156–157. In today’s literature and film the question also arises around artificial intelligence and also potential extraterrestrial lifeforms.

PORNOGRAPHY

See **Going Farther** #5 for an overview of the issue, which includes Reading #11 (Steinem, “Erotica vs. Pornography”).

POVERTY

Going Farther #8 discusses Peter Singer's solution to world poverty, which is for better-off people to give much more of their income to help, on the simplest (he claims) utilitarian grounds. **Welfare** is the issue in focus in Exercises 9.4 and 10.2. On Muhammed Yunnus's work fighting poverty with "micro-credit," see pages 522–524. See also **Distribution of wealth**.

RACISM

Reading #1 (Ellis, "It Was Almost Like Being Born Again") tells a compelling story of a former Klan leader who was able to make a radical ethical shift beyond that virulent form of racism. There is a follow-up challenge on pages 25–26. **Going Farther #6/Reading #12** (Coates, from "Letter to My Son") directly addresses racism today. Chapter 14 returns to the question against the background of moral vision, taking Martin Luther King Jr. as a paradigmatic moral visionary: see pages 465–467, 469–471, and (re. the civil rights movement generally) 471–473. Exercise 14.4 re-invokes Coates to pose the question of what a moral vision beyond racism might look like now.

SCHOOL, ETHICS IN

Question #1 in Exercises 5.2, 6.2, 7.2, and 8.2 raises the issue of ethics in school from the point of view of each of the four families of values. Each repetition of the question adds some new information or thought probes. **Going Farther #9**, including Reading #21 (Sadler, "What's Wrong with Plagiarism?"), pushes the question farther by challenging students to put together a Student Code of Ethics. Many different potential aspects of such a Code are outlined there. **Going Farther #13**, following the chapters on dialogue and dealing constructively with conflicts of values, challenges a class to construct its own Ethical Commitments, again offering an initial infrastructure for such a project. Students' capacities and unique strategies for "Making a Difference" are highlighted on pages 529–531.

SEX

Chapter 4 illustrates the families of moral values partly by using moral values related to sex as an example, starting on pages 99–101. See also **Going Farther #5**, including Reading #11 (Steinem, "Erotica vs. Pornography").

SEXISM

Going Farther #1 and its Reading #2 (Walker, from “Moral Understandings”) foreground feminist ethics and its struggle to re-value traditionally de-valued realms identified with women, especially children and family, while at the same time to free women from being restricted to and by them (pages 28–29). The theme returns from another angle in chapter 8’s discussion of the Ethics of Care (pages 245–248) including Reading #19 (Noddings, from *Caring*). Chapter 3, page 75, points out religious ethics’ recent struggles against a received sexism that it often embodied and forwarded. See also **Going Farther #5**, including Reading #11 (Steinem, “Erotica vs. Pornography”).

SUSTAINABILITY

Going Farther #16 / Reading #34 (McDonough, “Design for a New World”) frames sustainable design as an ethical issue of justice to future generations (see **Future generations, justice to**). See also **Environmental ethics**.

VEGETARIANISM

Going Farther #2, with readings #3 (Walker, “Am I Blue?”) and #4 (Kerasote, from *Bloodties*) debate meat-eating in the context of the larger question of our relation to other animals. Question #5 in Exercises 5.2, 6.2, 7.2, and 8.2 raises the issue of the human relation to other animals from the point of view of each of the four families of values. Each repetition of the question adds some new information or thought probes, some relating to the use of animals for food. In **Going Farther #11**, readings #26 (Foer, “A Case for Eating Dogs”) and #27 (Southan, “The Vegans Have Landed”) pose some major challenges to everyone’s consistency on this issue. Chapter 11 on Dialogue opens with a sample dialogue on the treatment of animals (pages 368). Chapter 12’s Reading #31 (Gottlieb, “Can We Talk?”) follows up with a reflection on “understanding the other side in the animal rights debate.” See pages 467–469 for some imaginative explorations of other-than-meat diets. See also, in general, **Animals (other than human)**.

WELFARE

Exercises 9.4 and 10.2 focus on the welfare question as a factual issue and as a question of consistency, respectively. **Going Farther #7** elaborates on theories of justice, particularly in regard to the **Distribution of wealth**. **Going Farther #8** discusses Peter Singer’s solution to world poverty, which is for better-off

people to give much more of their income to help, on the simplest (he claims) utilitarian grounds. See also **Poverty**.

WORK ETHIC

Chapter 4 illustrates the families of moral values partly by using moral values related to work as an example (page 107). Question #2 in Exercises 5.2, 6.2, 7.2, and 8.2 raises the general issue of work from the point of view of each of the four families of values. Each repetition of the question adds some new information or thought probes.

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